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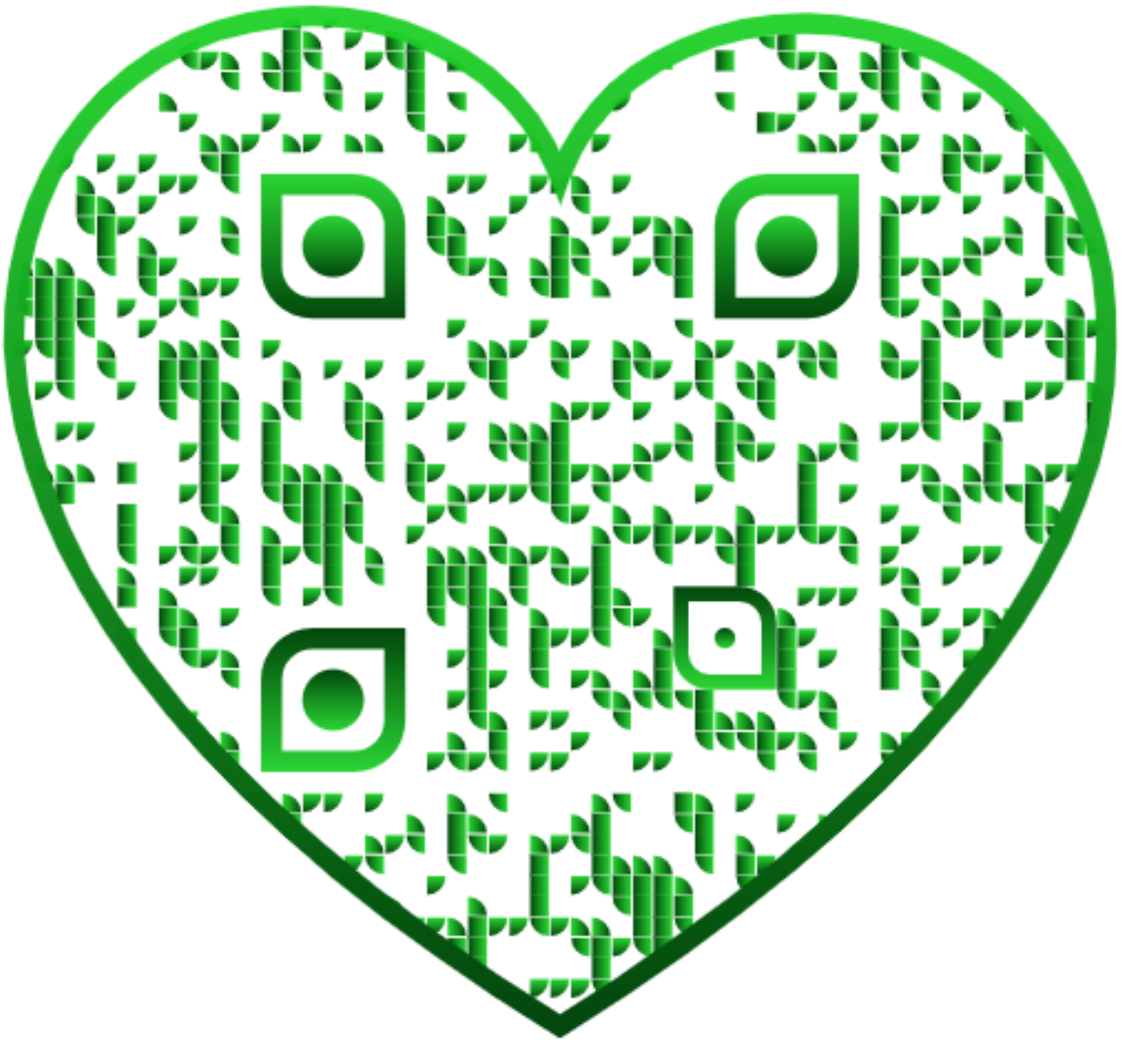

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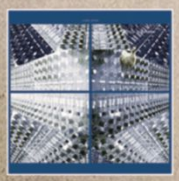

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(Dave's Picks 2016 shown)

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Editor's Note

DECEMBER 2016

relix
V43 NO8

IT SURE HAS BEEN A year of change and turmoil and, if the past month has proven anything, 2016 plans on making history until the New Year's ball drops. Since our last issue hit newsstands, we've said goodbye to musical luminaries and longtime *Relix* muses like Leonard Cohen, Leon Russell and Mose Allison. We've also seen Win Butler, Robert Randolph, Craig Finn, Matisyahu and Joe Russo reach across the genre aisles in the name of "jamming the vote." And we've watched the world react in shock to the biggest presidential election upset in U.S. history. In certain ways, it felt strange to talk about new albums and upcoming shows at a time when the world felt more uncertain with every morning headline.

But while I was editing this month's Chris Robinson Brotherhood cover story in the wake of Donald Trump's win and the deafening conversation that followed—I actually took a rare social media cleanse—a quote from that story struck me in a very real way. "At the end of the day, it's a bond or a connection between people who understand the madness of it all," Robinson says of his Brotherhood and their collective group spirit. "It's given us great fulfillment, great joy, great adventure. It's also been a way to deal with all the other stuff—the great confusion, the great pain and the great losses."

Throughout history, great music has often come at times of great political upheaval—both as an important means of expression and as a comforting coping mechanism—and no matter how things shape up in Washington, D.C., I'm placing my vote of confidence in the powerful music that's waiting to be created.

In other cases, a timeless album is simply a way to document a certain moment and personal feelings during a time of uncertainty and confusion. This was the case for me shortly before the election, when one of my favorite modern records, The Slip's *Eisenhower* turned 10 years old. The definitive post-jam album, it still captures my feelings of a distinct time in my life, the wide-eyed uncertainty of my 20s, with heartfelt lyrics like: "It's the day before the rest of my life/ And I feel like Dylan Thomas/ Says my muse, if you stay I'll go/ If I'm not lying I'm not being honest" and "Just a flurry of white dresses and second guesses/ Now lesses which martyr me."

Its more topical songs also still feel eerily in line with today's discourse: "Even the rats know when trouble's gonna come/ To the edge of the city, see the little guys run/ I hear spring is nice in Canada/ Maybe the men up on Capitol Hill/ Need a little less Jack and a little more Jill/ You can have my stereo."

Yet The Slip also reminds us that "Even though the race may never be won/ I can lay like a dandy getting heavy in the sun/ Take a love song and beautify."

Sometimes you need those love songs to get you through the hard times and to remind everyone there's still some hope out there. Here's to a more peaceful 2017, where the power of music trumps politics, and we're finally able to run a review of The Slip album we've been eagerly awaiting for a decade.

MIKE GREENHAUS
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ON THE COVER

Justin Borucki shot The Chris Robinson Brotherhood.

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FEATURES

54 Cult Science

Chris Robinson Brotherhood has always been a tried-and-true *band*, more interested in channeling a groupthink mentality through improvisation than simply showcasing their famous frontman and namesake. However, in many ways, their fourth studio effort, *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel*, is their true collaborative statement, written and recorded as a unit in a Big Pink-like clubhouse full of cosmic, California energy on the edge of Stinson Beach. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** spent time in the studio with the quintet's new lineup earlier this year and found out how these veteran musicians are still able to stir their magical cauldron so deep into their careers.

52 The Gold Circle

Though often overshadowed by their more famous peers, **Nitty Gritty Dirt Band** are true Americana pioneers. And, despite the music industry's ebbs and flows, some short breaks and one unfortunate name change, they've managed to outlast The Band, The Flying Burrito Brothers and Poco, and reach their 50-year mark without any signs of stopping. **Lee Zimmerman** caught up with longtime members **Jeff Hanna** and **John McEuen** as they celebrated their golden anniversary and explores why their circle still remains unbroken.

49 The Unexpected and the Inevitable

Dawes rode onto the festival circuit with a semi-acoustic, Laurel Canyon sound that earned them a reputation as the roots-rock world's next great hope. So even the quartet's most ardent fans were a bit surprised when frontman **Taylor Goldsmith** plugged in for their latest, electric, eclectic offering, the guest-heavy *We're All Gonna Die*. Yet, as Taylor and his brother **Griffin** explain to **Larson Sutton**, their new end-of-the-world party is just the first of many left turns on their roadmap to success.

46 White Denim's Third Wind

When two key members of **White Denim**'s lineup left last year to continue working with soul sensation **Leon Bridges**, the quartet's future seemed uncertain. But as Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** discovers, the Austin garage-rock heroes are no strangers to change, and the ensemble quickly bounced back with a new lineup and new take on their mix of prog-rock technicality and indie-rock swagger. And, despite its title, *Stiff* may be White Denim's most fun and free album yet.

43 Into the Mystic

A few years ago, **Jim James** decided to score a pair of films with a friend and quickly engulfed himself in the creative process. The only problem was that the music he created was simply too weird for the silver screen. Now, that experiment has helped seed his sophomore solo offering, *Eternally Even*, a provocative, groove-ridden and soul-inflected collection that **Sami Promisloff** identifies as a perfect soundtrack for this season of uncertainty.

40 Trips Festival

Augustus Owsley Stanley isn't a stranger to the pages of *Relix*. The grandson of a Kentucky politician, he used his considerable intelligence and resources to serve as the Grateful Dead's soundman, patron and acid supplier. In this exclusive excerpt from the new book, *Bear: The Life and Times of Augustus Stanley III*, veteran journalist **Robert Greenfield** explores the chemist's long, strange trip with the Grateful Dead and how he helped warp the minds of the ragtag band that would quickly learn to pass the Acid Tests.

38 Redemption Songs

The Devil Makes Three have always walked the tightrope between DIY punk and old-timey jams. However, the trio's diverse interests and varied backgrounds have never been as apparent as on their new collection of covers, *Redemption & Ruin*. Assistant Editor **Matt Inman** takes an in-depth look at that set of songs, which nod to drinking, drugs, self-destruction and God, while also connecting the dots between Robert Johnson and Tom Waits.

URBAN LEGEND

solodallas.com

Photo courtesy of inventor Ken Schaffer (on right.) August 24, 1977. Palladium, New York City.

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Dear Relix

Here's what readers are talking about online and offline

Wilco

DEAR RELIX

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

AND THE NOMINEES ARE…

In October, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame announced their 2017 nominees, including Pearl Jam, MC5, The Cars, The Zombies, Chic, Jane's Addiction, Depeche Mode, Bad Brains, Kraftwerk and Electric Light Orchestra. The always controversial list elicited a mix of responses from readers.

This is, and always will be, a farce. Everyone who ever released a decent LP can't be in. Look at baseball, you have season all-stars, MVPs and other accolades, but only a few Hall of Famers. It's impossible to translate that to music without hard, cold stats and facts. And no Warren Zevon is definitely a travesty.

Bill via Jambands.com

Part of me is really glad to see Bad Brains being nominated. But there are other more influential punk bands that deserve to be nominated first.

Otto via Jambands.com

Very shocked that the Brains are considered but GLAD! Journey? Good band but can't see them in. It's the same thing with Depeche Mode and, definitely, Kraftwerk (and everyone else as well).

Rod via Relix.com

JACKLYN LABRANCH: FROM JERRY GARCIA BAND TO SYMPHONIC CELEBRATIONS

Thanks, Jacklyn. I can hear your music in your words and there's nothing like mutual musical admiration, e.g., yours for Jerry ("Deadicated: Jacklyn LaBranch," October_November 2016) and vice versa to make our fan ears sparkle. Hope you do some gigs with Warren [Haynes] or Melvin [Seals], or both, here on the East Coast before or after next February in San Francisco.

Shari via Relix.com

I was blessed to spend many, many nights with the Garcia Band. Such sweet and beautiful music came from that strong sextet. Jacklyn and Gloria Jones' heavenly vocals smoothed and embellished Garcia's often-congested reedy tenor. Garcia sang beautifully, but he did not have a great voice. When the girls were with him, he sounded better.

I am so happy that Jacklyn is doing well and enjoying her life. She will never know the joy she helped spread. Great interview. Thank you for catching us up with this soulful woman.

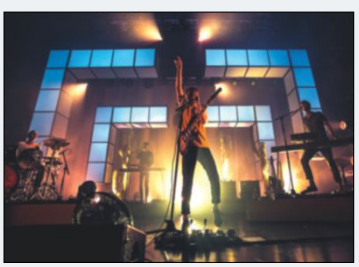
OldOregonDeadhead via Relix.com

NELS CLINE TALKS WILCO

In early September, Wilco surprised fans with their second album in as many years. *Schmilco* finds the band embracing their more delicate, acoustic side with a focus on songwriting to complement the weirder, more experimental *Star Wars*, released in 2015. "*Star Wars* is pretty much a rock record," Wilco guitarist Nels Cline told Jambands.com. "This is a little breezier. It's not downtempo, but it's based around Jeff [Tweedy] playing acoustic guitar and not singing in a full-voice. He's doing a more winsome, airier vocal thing on most of the material."

Cline notes that much of this new material originated around the same time as the tunes that comprised *Star Wars*. "[Tweedy] basically generated a lot of rough material by himself in The Loft, while a lot of stuff was going on with his personal life in his family."

Much like *Star Wars*, *Schmilco* showcases Wilco's ability to deliver a concise record that's still packed with meaning and depth. "The songs are all pretty much classic pop length," Cline explains. "The record is of classic vinyl length, so it is not jammed out. There's no [2011's *The Whole Love* standout] 'Art of Almost' on this record. [They are just] some really beautiful songs, in my mind."



FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Glass Animals performing at The Wilma in Missoula, Mont., on Oct. 10, 2016. Photo by Jeffrey Neubauer Media.

Want to be published in Relix? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to Relix.com's Fans.com Photo Contest app. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from the group of 10 finalists who receive the most votes.

INSTAPRINT

Tour routing can help facilitate some unexpected collaborations, and that's precisely what happened in Nashville this October when Bob Weir found himself playing the famed Ryman Auditorium during Phish's (@phish) two-night stand at Ascend Amphitheater. During the first night of Phish's Nashville run, Weir joined the group onstage for the first time in 16 years, collaborating on six tunes: "Samson and Delilah," "Twist," "Miss You," "West L.A. Fadeaway," "Playing in the Band" and "Quinn the Eskimo." Weir even sang lead on "Miss You," a track off Phish's fall release, *Big Boat*.

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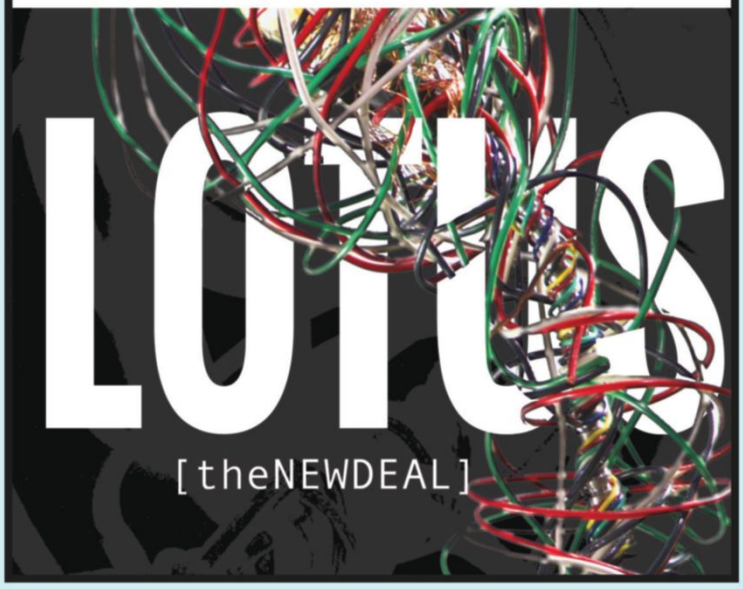
DECEMBER 29



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SUWANNEE HULAWEEN

SPIRIT OF THE SUWANNEE MUSIC PARK
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OCTOBER 27-30
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VANN

Over Halloween weekend, Suwannee Hulaween returned to the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park for another year of visual and auditory splendor. **The String Cheese Incident** once again hosted the event, taking the stage seven times alongside numerous guest players, confetti and pyrotechnics aplenty. In addition to five stages of live music and two late-night Silent Discos, the site's Spanish-moss-draped oak and cypress trees alongside the Suwannee River were transformed into Spirit Lake, a series of art installations, curated by longtime SCI lighting director **Andy Carroll** and enhanced by fellow LD **John Hollingshead**.

Musicians seemingly reveled in the *spirit* of the occasion, offering striking sets peppered with costume covers and collaborative moments. **Umphrey's McGee** anchored Thursday's pre-party with a high-energy, two-set show, while guitarist **Jake Cinninger** joined **EOTO** earlier in the day. On Friday, **Joe Russo** and **Marco Benevento** partnered with **Oteil Burbridge** for a high-wire trio performance. Later that night, **My Morning Jacket**, who recently backed Roger Waters at the Bridge School Benefit Concert, debuted a version of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)." **Larry Keel** and Leftover Salmon's **Drew Emmitt** picked on some mountain music on Saturday afternoon, along with Keel's Natural Bridge alum **Andy Thorn**, who currently appears with Emmitt in Salmon. Then on Sunday, **Les Claypool** and **Sean Lennon** reassembled their **Delirium**, following an extensive tour that wrapped-up in early September.

The highlight for many was Saturday's "Stringier Things," a nod to the hit Netflix series *Stranger Things*, during which The String Cheese Incident covered music from the show's era for their second of three sets that night. Joined by singers **Rhonda Thomas** and **Tony White** as well as the **Antibalas Horns**, the group debuted takes on songs such as the Eurythmics' "Would I Lie to You?," Thomas Dolby's "She Blinded Me With Science," Guns N' Roses' "Sweet Child O' Mine" and The B-52's "Love Shack." On Sunday, the group welcomed **The Travelin' McCourys** for "Mountain Girls," "Shady Grove" and "Don't It Make You Wanna Dance," as well as **Big Gigantic** sax player **Dominic Lalli** for "Freedom Jazz Dance" and "Beautiful." SCI's **Jason Hann** and **Michael Travis** also participated in the weekend's finale: an animated post-String Cheese performance from Big Gigantic featuring **The Motet**, which transformed the park into a bumping dance party on All Hallows' Eve's eve.

Place Station

My Cross to Bear BY HANK SULLIVANT

KUROMA COULD only come out of Athens, Ga., and will probably only exist for as long as I live in Athens, Ga. To be fair, Kuroma has played only two Athens shows in the last five years, so I wouldn't claim that we're a very critical part of the Athens music scene. Also, since 2012, my bandmates have been New Yorkers—the Kuroma band is made up of members of the MGMT touring band.

So how is Kuroma an Athens band all the way, through and through, and without question? It's because of something that, to me, is a bit more mysterious. Out of four full-length Kuroma albums—during which I also lived in New York, Memphis and Savannah—I can only think of three songs I didn't write in Athens. And every single time I have hit a creative stride, it has been during a prolonged period of time living in Athens.

The first musical awakening I had in Athens was around my freshman/sophomore year at the university, and it actually had everything to do with Memphis. I'd never actively listened to Memphis soul music while I was growing up in that very city, but when I bought the *Dreams to Remember* Otis Redding anthology during college, I really felt like I already understood it. It took me directly to Memphis, the feeling of the air and the people—a mystical feeling of the place. I really missed home, so I listened to it quite a lot. I played guitar along with it and Steve Cropper became my favorite guitarist. I thought Stax was a miracle.

As far as my homesickness, it wasn't just the city that the music brought to my senses—it also reminded me of the area and the land, the river, for sure, the Delta. My grandparents lived in Clarksdale, Miss., and the drives to visit them on

Highway 61, surrounded by all of that beautiful flat farmland, are etched into my, you guessed it, *soul*. None of this, of course, resulted in an outpouring of "soul music." Instead, it actually fed an actively creative period in my contributions to The Whigs.

Later in college, I entered a bit of a lull to say the least. The only times my senses felt truly alive were when I'd get out of town, specifically when I visited New York a couple of times. After one of these trips, back in '05, I came home to Athens, manic as a March hare, and wrote all of the music for the first Kuroma album in a couple of weeks. I'd had recurring dreams about New York, which I related to my friend Andrew VanWyngarden of MGMT, and he said, "Then why don't you just move here?" When he asked me to join his band, that's exactly what I did. It was probably the most exhilarating time of my life—mind-blowing. It's hard to explain, but pop music became more than itself. It became apocalyptic, a signpost of an impending collision with the supernatural, and the city reflected it. And I was turned on to bands that seemed to completely "get" this and use it. Ben Goldwasser came over one night and played me The Teardrop Explodes, Psychic TV, The Legendary Pink Dots and Helios Creed. It was the most stupefying listening experience of my entire life.

That summer in New York had a profound effect on me. And yet, I don't think I wrote one song the entire time. It wasn't until I came back to Athens in 2008 that I started pouring out music. It was an energetic year—playing Kuroma shows regularly, writing *Psychopomp*. I even had a "#maga'zine" with Alejandro Crawford called *Le Dodo*. Then I moved to New York City again in 2009, and this time it was emptiness—a perfect prescription of emptiness. Without realizing it at the time, I started becoming, *whoops*, a Roman Catholic. I came back to Athens and this time wrote *Kuromarama*. The conversion intensified and I was confirmed in 2012. Once again, Athens was this place where all these life ingredients could simmer into a soup.

I rejoined MGMT in 2013. We toured everywhere and I saw six continents in a year. A big part of the adventure was my somewhat double life as a practicing Catholic. I kept it pretty hidden, not because I thought my bandmates were unsupportive—in fact, I knew they were supportive—but because I never wanted to come off as pious. And, furthermore, it was personal. My conversion was still new and ongoing. One of my favorite things was making it to Sunday Mass wherever we happened to be. I attended Holy Mass in Los Angeles, Seattle, Kelowna, Des Moines, Nashville, Austin, New York, El Paso, Pittsburgh, Marseille, Milan, Paris, São Paulo and Buenos Aires. I attended Palm Sunday and Easter services in Palm Springs, Calif., during weeks one and two of Coachella in 2014. Then there was the time I got on the Mexico City subway, with two hours to spare before lobby call to the festival we were playing, and rode 11 stops to the site of Our Lady of Guadalupe and made it back in the nick of time. I wouldn't tell anybody about stuff like that. It was my secret.

Those experiences around the world deeply influenced *The Dark Horse Rides Again*. But it was only when touring started slowing down, and I was planted in Athens, that it all came pouring out and turned into something. I don't know why it happens like that. And I never know why I do it. It's not like I'm writing for a huge audience, or that I consider it inherently important. It just happens, and I've always followed through with it. And it always comes together in the Classic City, Athens, Ga. In conclusion: Go Dawgs. Just kidding, go Rebels.

Kuroma, Hank Sullivant's primary creative outlet, released their latest record, The Dark Horse Rides Again, *in October. In addition to his work with the psych-pop project, Sullivant co-founded the Athens, Ga., trio The Whigs while studying at the University of Georgia and is a longtime touring member of MGMT.*

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LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

"Moonage Daydream" in Vegas

PHISH

MGM GRAND GARDEN ARENA
LAS VEGAS
OCTOBER 31

Phish's folklore has a way of expanding exponentially, even when it appears as though the band's legend has reached its apex. Whether through brilliant improvisational playing, festival pioneering, elaborate in-jokes or high-profile collaborations, the Vermont jam titans have managed to up the ante consistently over the course of their career. After abandoning their Halloween tradition of covering another artist's full-length album in 2013 and 2014, this year Phish revived the concept of reinterpreting a classic LP, taking on David Bowie's *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars*.

The spectacle's Las Vegas backdrop only strengthened the magic of the moment—17,000 (mostly) masquerading fans descended upon the MGM Grand Garden Arena, their spirits and expectations high as news of the Bowie tribute was revealed. Coming off three of their most widely well-received concerts of the year the preceding nights, Phish entered in full creative stride, equipped with a practically perfect musical costume for the occasion. The sudden passing of Bowie earlier this year set the stage for an impassioned and cathartic experience.

An opening set of original Phish songs came first, with a dark jam stretching into an early appearance of "Carini" to kick things off. "Possum," "Tube" and "Wolfman's Brother" channeled the night's high-energy, arena-rock glory while the band worked in some hushed vibes via the patient instrumental "What's the Use?" and a precise presentation of "Petrichor"—**Trey Anastasio**'s latest multi-part opus. Following the typically ecstatic set-closer "Run Like an Antelope," the band took an intermission and all thoughts turned to the celebration to come.

Backed by a bevy of guest musicians and dressed to impress, the four members of Phish returned for one of their defining undertakings. A string section of **Sylvia D'Avanzo**, **Alisa Horn**, **Hiroko Taguchi**, **Todd Low**, **Antoine Silverman** and **Alissa Smith**, along with vocalists **Jennifer Hartswick**, **Jo Lampert** and **Celisse Henderson** lent both zest and nuance to the endeavor. Band and audience fully clicked on "Moonage Daydream"—the third *Ziggy Stardust* cut—and never looked back. **Mike Gordon** took the vocal reins on "Starman" as the crowd sang along and the majesty of the moment came into focus. Anastasio then shed his guitar to take on frontman duties for the sultry "It Ain't Easy," highlighting the many offerings of poignant lyrics from the fabled record. The vibe in the room reached fever pitch as the iconic riff of *Ziggy*'s title track tore through the air, with Anastasio relishing his long-awaited rendition and **Page McConnell** singing lead. A glorious version of the hard-driving "Suffragette City" dialed the energy up once more, leading to a final emotional outpouring for Anastasio's exceptional take on the weighty "Roll 'n' Roll Suicide."

For the final hour of what had been a monumental weekend, Phish threw down a selection of their own classics enlivened by the same brand of top-level jamming that colored their whole Vegas visit. "Sand" entered gritty, psychedelic territory, "Twist" saw Anastasio, Gordon and McConnell joining **Jon Fishman** on drums for an all-percussion outro, and "Meatstick" and "Slave to the Traffic Light" provided the bliss needed to send everyone home floating on air. An a cappella cover of Bowie's "Space Oddity"—impeccable in its timeliness and Phish-style merging of silly and sublime—filled the encore slot triumphantly.

As fans trickled out into the crisp Nevada night, some were surprised at the omission of the Phish original "David Bowie" but, mostly, there was a feeling of gratitude and wonder at the collective freak-out all had just witnessed.

Dan Warry-Smith

René Huemer

THE HEAD AND THE HEART

ORPHEUM THEATRE
BOSTON
OCTOBER 18

It was a subdued **The Head and the Heart** that took the stage at Boston's Orpheum Theatre during an early stop on their current U.S. tour. The band, whose third album, *Signs of Light*, was released in September, are touring without founding member Josiah Johnson, who has taken a hiatus from the road to deal with an addiction issue. It may be unfair to compare the current unit to the band with Johnson present, but it is also unavoidable. Besides his voice, which is an integral part of The Head and the Heart's sound, Johnson brought a certain energy to the group's live shows that the remaining members struggled to match at times, particularly early in the evening.

The band opened the show with the two songs that kick off *Signs of Light*, "All We Ever Knew" and "City of Angels," before returning to one of the singles from their self-titled debut, "Ghosts." Without Johnson, guitarist and vocalist **Jonathan Russell** had to hold down center stage for the whole show, a role that he seemed more comfortable sharing with his missing bandmate. THATH veterans **Charity Rose Thielen** on violin and vocals, **Kenny Hensley** on piano, **Chris Zasche** on bass and **Tyler Williams** on drums joined Russell. **Matt Gervais**, Thielen's husband and a longtime friend of the group, is filling in for Johnson.

The band seemed to hit their stride midway through the main set, as "Another Story" led into "Let's Be Still," the title track from their second album—and a song whose lyrics seemed more than a touch prophetic. "The world's just spinning, a little too fast/If things don't slow down soon, we might not last." Another new track followed, the excellent "Your Mother's Eyes," before the group hit the first big crowd-pleaser of the night, "Lost in My Mind." Several other songs off the new album fit well with the band's existing canon, including a dreamy "Colors." They then soared on the closing song of their main set, "Down in the Valley," before returning for a lengthy encore that included the new tune "Library Magic"—with its apt refrain "There will always be better days"—as well as an upbeat "Shake" and an anthemic "Rivers and Roads."

In the end, one has to give The Head and the Heart credit for soldiering on despite Johnson's noticeable absence, when the alternative would simply be to stay off the road altogether. Gervais does an admirable job filling a difficult slot—so much so that he may remain in the band after Johnson's hoped-for return.

Matthew Shelter

Even without Josiah Johnson, the Head and the Heart still connect

AMOS LEE

THE CHICAGO THEATRE
CHICAGO
OCTOBER 28

As Chicago's North Side buzzed with excitement around the city's first home World Series game in more than 70 years, a sizable crowd assembled in the downtown Chicago Theatre for an evening with **Amos Lee**. On tour to celebrate his most recent studio album, *Spirit*, Lee treated fans to nearly two hours that reflected where he's been the past 12 years and showcased the newfound creative freedom that his first self-produced album has brought him.

Under gold-drenched walls and a lush, red stage curtain, Lee and his six-piece band emerged as ghost-like shadows amid a dark, purple light and the faint sounds of a gospel-like choir. The stage came alive with the full-bodied instrumentals, punching keyboards, and haunting harmonies of "Highways and Clouds" from *Spirit* before Lee and his goup launched into the foot-stomping, banjo-rich "Jesus" from 2011's *Mission Bell*.

"I'm feelin' y'all," Lee proclaimed. "Y'all made it here on a Cubs World Series night, so I'm gonna give it to you." Behind glasses and belted slacks that said "church" and sultry dance moves that said otherwise, Lee's silky vocals led into 2011's "Cup of Sorrow."

Lee dedicated the title track from his new album to people with heart—like the New Orleans singer who inspired the song with the passion he exuded while playing by himself and Lee's grandma, who "raised eight kids with no applause." The band left Lee alone in the spotlight for a sweet "Arms of a Woman" that filled the theater with his soulful voice. The singer noted the changes in his life that took him from high-school athlete to school teacher to today, before launching into a meaningful "A Change Is Gonna Come" by Chicago's Sam Cooke.

When Lee's group returned, they surrounded him center stage with a banjo, accordion, and more for bluegrass takes on "Supply and Demand" and "Tricksters, Hucksters and Scamps." After the lush "Baby I Want You," Lee proclaimed "I'm gonna get a little slinky with ya, if we didn't just get slinky." Although slinky isn't usually a word used to describe Hall & Oates' "Sara Smile," Lee and his band managed to give the song a sensual edge with the help of opener **Mutlu**'s vocals and a mid-song transition into Ginuwine's "Pony," led by the talented **Zach Djanikian**.

Lee showcased the extreme versatility of his voice on new tune "Walls" before bringing the crowd to their feet for fan-favorite "Windows Are Rolled Down." The band returned to the stage for the encore right about the time the audience inevitably got wind that the Cubs had lost Game 3 of the World Series. In an effort to ease the crowd's pain, Lee—who had seen four innings of the game before the show—treated fans to a "Night Train" that got the room clapping and a jubilant "Sweet Pea" that appeared to be just what the doctor ordered.

Heather Farr

Amos Lee salutes Chicago fans during Game 3 of the World Series

Matthew Shelter (THATH), Mandy Pichler (Amos Lee)

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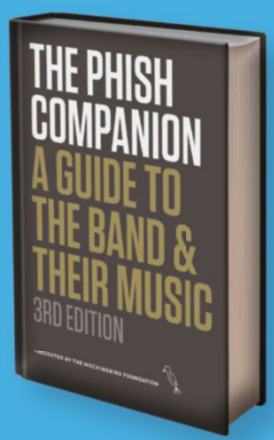

The third edition of **The Phish Companion: A Guide to the Band & Their Music** is more than an essential reference guide. It's a hard-bound, 898-page, full-color feast for the senses.

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WIDESPREAD PANIC

1STBANK CENTER
BROOMFIELD, COLO.
OCTOBER 29

Colorado has had a long and storied relationship with **Widespread Panic**. The band holds the record for most sold-out performances at Red Rocks Amphitheatre (currently at 51). In recent years, the state has also become an event destination, hosting the acoustic Wood Tour and now two Halloween runs at the 1stBank Center. With the latest announcement from Widespread that they will no longer be touring extensively, fans flocked to Broomfield for the end of the fall tour and some Halloween shenanigans. Night two of the three-show-run featured some incredible musical gymnastics from these road-weary veterans.

Widespread opened with "Coconut" for the first time since 2007, soaring into the first set elegantly. It seemed that the band was feeling nostalgic keeping the train of classics coming with "Holden Oversoul," followed by a searing "Sleepy Monkey." **John Bell**'s signature growl was in fine form as he treated fans to the first "Dirty Business" in over a year. The audience went wild for the elusive David Bromberg cover "Sharon," one of those songs fans tend to chase. The set continued with some newer numbers including "Sell, Sell," which featured buttery guitar work from the brilliant **Jimmy Herring**, as the costumed crowd danced enthusiastically. A tight "Cease Fire" showcased some amazing back-and-forth percussion between newest member **Duane Trucks** and the estimable **Domingo "Sunny" Ortiz**. Trucks has settled into his role nicely; he is the solid backbone that fans have been craving. "Jamais Vu" picked up the pace before a monstrous "Tail Dragger" ended the first set.

Widespread Panic pulled out another landmark track to get the ball rolling, this time in the form of "Surprise Valley." The transition into "Tie Your Shoes" got downright jazzy, before they returned to "Surprise Valley" to bookend the sequence. There was a palpable energy in the crowd as **JoJo Hermann** led the band into a rowdy "Blackout Blues." Next, Widespread went into a bouncy rendition of Bob Dylan's "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall." They then invited **Jennifer Kreps** up to add her shekere to a rock-solid "Chainsaw City." The short-but-sweet "Mercy" brought the audience to the ground floor before a monumental drum solo from Trucks and Ortiz. Bassist **Dave Schools**, who was on point all night, truly cranked on "Hatfield." They closed the set with a perfectly placed "Love Tractor."

Bustouts happen relatively regularly, but rarely does one see a gap of 1,462 shows between performances of a song, which is what happened when Widespread Panic threw it all the way back to Halloween 1997 with a rocking cover of The Doors' "L.A. Woman." Panic continued their run of Black Sabbath covers with another breakout on "Iron Man," which had not been performed since Halloween 2011, a span of 309 shows. With this, the group called it an evening as thousands of elated fans streamed out into the temperate night air. ***Nicholas Stock***

Panic goes big in Broomfield

Nicholas Stock

Nicole Atkins returns to New York in style

Brian Berson

NICOLE ATKINS

LE POISSON ROUGE
NEW YORK
OCTOBER 25

Nicole Atkins started her performance before most of the crowd even knew what was happening. From the center of the room, the singer-songwriter, born and raised just across the Hudson in New Jersey, treated her fans to a solo acoustic rendition of "Neptune City," the title track from her debut LP—one of several homages to her native land.

As she invited the crowd to come in closer, Atkins admitted a bit of apprehension—understandable, as this was her first true New York headlining show in three years—but all reservations quickly melted away as the gathered mass began to sing along to one of the singer's most beautiful compositions.

Atkins then made her way onstage, where her backing band was waiting. In true hometown spirit, Brooklyn-based three-piece **WOLF!**, a group of Jersey natives themselves, joined her, along with keyboardist **Matt Wade**. Moving seamlessly from an old tune to a new one, Atkins and company then launched into "A Little Crazy," the first single from her upcoming album, *Goodnight Rhonda Lee*, which she debuted during an episode of Showtime's *Roadies*. The vocal-showcase melody of the song opened up the performance with the first of many live debuts off the new effort.

"I wrote this song in 1971," Atkins joked before the next song, "Maybe Tonight," another cut from her first record. She then welcomed a horn section of saxophonist **Dennis Daley** and trumpeter **Eric Tait** to the stage, who added to the next tune, "Darkness Falls" and the Motown feel of "Sleepwalking."

Atkins prefaced the latter song with a dose of her sometimes endearingly self-deprecating stage banter, saying, "All of my songs are about sleeping or dreaming or crying." She then followed it up with an appropriate run of "Cry Cry Cry" from her sophomore effort *Mondo Amore*.

Atkins has spoken about her hot and cold relationship with the places she's lived, including her New Jersey home and her new residence in Nashville, where she moved a year ago. The next song, "I Love Living Here Even When I Don't," embodied that feeling with lyrics like "It's a beat-up little town/I want to burn it to the fucking ground."

"Listen Up" found Atkins trading vocals with keyboardist Wade, and then unveiling the title track of her new album, a country-western-tinged tune she co-wrote with Chris Isaak that featured a tasty Telecaster solo from WOLF! guitarist **Scott Metzger**.

After a rocking ending to "Love Surreal" to finish the stage show, Atkins once again took to the crowd to cover one of her self-proclaimed biggest influences, rounding out the show with a sing-along rendition of Roy Orbison's "Crying," a fitting conclusion that welcomed the talented musician back to the stage and back to New York. ***Matt Inman***

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NEWS: ELECTION JAMS

HeadCount, the live-music world's leading voter registration organization, named their Election Day concert "Soundtrack to History" and, as it turns out, that title was a fitting summation of the evening's happenings. Held at New York's Brooklyn Bowl on the night of November 8, the event was a nod to the jam community that the nonpartisan group was founded on: A stacked version of **The Everyone Orchestra** conducted by **Matt Butler**, offered a set of improvisational music as the results rolled in on the venue's numerous jumbo television screens. Their music reflected the largely left-leaning crowd, with the likes of **Marco Benevento**, **Steve Kimock**, former Motet singer **Jans Ingber**, Disco Biscuits bassist and HeadCount co-founder **Marc Brownstein**, Disco Biscuits keyboardist **Aron Magner**, moe. drummer **Vinnie Amico**, Big Gigantic drummer **Jeremy Salken**, members of **Snarky Puppy** and others moving through hopeful pockets of funk and livetronica during the early part of the show. (They reacted to moments with impromptu lyrics like "It's too soon to tell," and the new marijuana laws that multiple states adopted with a cover of Peter Tosh's "Legalize It" spotlighting Twiddle guitarist **Mihali Savoulidis**.) However, as the election unfolded and Donald Trump's historic upset became clearer, EO reflected the club's more somber mood. Surprise guest **Robert Randolph** and bassist **Karina Rykman** emerged for a resilient "God Bless America" that led into a dark, mostly instrumental "All Along the Watchtower"-like jam. The weight of the night was palpable until the evening's final note.

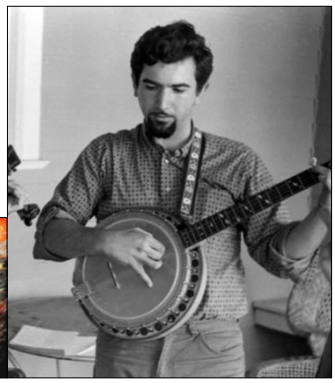
Two days earlier, Head-Count was involved in another all-star benefit at Port Chester, N.Y.'s Capitol Theatre, "Jam The Vote." The evening, which was organized by *Relix* publisher **Pete Shaprio**, recalled the collaborative feel of The Jammys. New Orleans institution **Preservation Hall Jazz Band** and guitarist **Sam Cohen** served as the evening's house band, backing a cross-generational cast that included **Lee Fields**, **Ivan Neville**, **Irma Thomas**, **Nicole Atkins**, **Amy Helm**, **Valerie June**, **Blind Boys of Alabama**, **Eugene Hutz** and **Alex Ebert**. (The latter singer offered a version of his Edward Sharpe hit "Home" that boasted a rousing meditation on race and politics by Pres Hall's **Ben Jaffe**.) The members of Preservation Hall, in different configurations, also held together a number of once-in-a-lifetime pairings that included Brownstein, **Matisyahu**, **Eric Krasno**, **DJ Logic** and **Aaron Dugan** (Bob Marley's "Crazy Baldhead"), Antibalas' **Amayo** and American Babies' **Tom Hamilton** ("Iko Iko"), Hamilton and **Win Butler** (Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A.") and a funk supergroup consisting of Neville, Butler, Randolph, Logic, **Joe Russo**, **George Porter Jr.** and others. At the end of the night, most of the evening's cast returned with **Craig Finn** for a sing-along version of Nick Lowe's "(What's So Funny 'Bout) Peace, Love and Understanding" that bled into an unplanned final group encore.

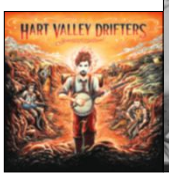
Jamming The Vote evokes the collaborative feel of The Jammys

Dino Perrucci

Hart Valley Drifters

A Grateful Dead collector unearths a time capsule containing Jerry Garcia's earliest studio session. BY DEAN BUDNICK





"MY NAME'S JERRY GARCIA. I play banjo on the old-timey songs and guitar on the bluegrass songs and do a lot of lead singing too, which I'm not proud of..."

So begins the famed musician's light, affable introduction to his first-ever studio recording, which took place at Stanford University's KZSU radio station Studio A during the late fall of 1962. (The date itself remains unknown, although it was likely November or December.) The 20-year-old Garcia appeared with the Hart Valley Drifters, a group that also featured two friends who would remain in his musical ambit for years to come: Robert Hunter (bass) and David Nelson (guitar), along with Ken Frankel (fiddle and banjo) and Norm Van Maastricht (dobro). Their performance has just been released on Round Records/ATO Records as *Folk Time*, after the name of the show on which they appeared.

In Hunter's own comments from that day, he explains that the group had previously dubbed itself the Thunder Mountain Tub Thumpers. Looking back on that era, Frankel now adds, "Every time we played, we had a different name. One time, we were riding around playing bluegrass on the back of a flatbed truck with a sound system for this guy running for sheriff of Monterey County [Hugh Bagley]. I think we changed our band name six times during that ride. It wasn't me doing it; it was Jerry and Bob. I don't think we had a specific name that lasted more than a month." As their shifting sobriquets suggest, the players never took themselves too seriously, although they did share a reverence for the music they were arranging and performing.

Frankel was a college student when he first met Garcia at Lundberg's Fretted Instruments in Berkeley. There, he discovered Jerry making tapes of acoustic music that had long fallen out of print. Frankel was thrilled to find someone who shared a similar interest. He remembers, "I grew up listening to pop music and rock-and-roll when it first came out. But the first time I ever heard that old-time music, I absolutely fell in love with it. Old-time music is the music that came before bluegrass, when they were first able to make records, and they made records from the southern mountain region of the Appalachians. In the 1920s, this was the traditional music that was played in the South and recorded for the first-ever records. Jerry was listening to some tapes there of these records that were 40 years old. People would create tapes. I told him that this was the same kind of music I played, and we just started playing together after that."

The two began performing in mostly informal settings, just for the pleasure of it all, with Garcia's pal Hunter typically participating, while various other aficionados of varying skill sets occasionally joined in as well.

Beyond their flatbed set for the aforementioned would-be Sheriff Bagley—the perennial candidate was not victorious in 1962 and would make subsequent unsuccessful runs for mayor, governor and eventually president—the group did sporadically appear in more formal environments. For many years, their only fully documented show was at the College of San Mateo Folk Festival on November 10, 1962, where their setlist included traditionals such as "Roving Gambler" (which opens *Folk Time*), "Pig in a Pen" and "Nine Pound Hammer."

A half-century later, intrepid Grateful Dead tape collector Brian Miksis discovered something of an archival holy grail. Miksis had long been searching for recordings of Garcia's early days, and this pursuit eventually led him to a former Stanford student named Ted Claire (who would go on to play rhythm guitar in Hunter's short-lived mid-'70s group, Roadhog). Claire explained that he had recorded live acoustic music in the early '60s for his KZSU radio shows, *Folk Time* and *Flinthill Special*, and that he had held onto a tape that might be of interest to Miksis. Claire briefly walked off and then returned with a reel that had been languishing in his closet for decades.

Frankel acknowledges that upon learning of this recording, "My first reaction was: 'I don't remember making a tape like that.' Then I listened to it, and I recognized my talking in the introduction. ['I'm Ken Frankel. I play fiddle on the old-timey songs and banjo on the new-timey songs, formerly bluegrass...'] I knew I played with Jerry a lot and I recognized my banjo playing and my guitar playing. It's the kind of music I played with Jerry and the same songs. David Nelson recently showed me some pictures from the session, which was pretty funny."

Folk Time provides a glimpse into the music that animated these five players, all of whom were between the ages of 19 and 22. It includes a pair of songs written by Earl Scruggs ("Ground Speed," "Flint Hill Special"), a couple of tunes by the Stanley Brothers ("Clinch Mountain Backstep," "Think of What You've Done"), the aforementioned traditionals, and the 16-song set closes out with a version of "Sitting on Top of the World," which would later find its way into the Grateful Dead repertoire. There were no originals (although Garcia and Hunter reportedly wrote at least one during this era, titled "Black Cat") because their intent was not to showcase new music. Instead, they wished to embrace and honor tradition at this moment during the incipient folk-music revival.

As for Garcia's self-effacing assessment of his vocals during the intro to *Folk Time*, Frankel muses, "I never thought Jerry was that great of a singer. But the main thing that struck me in listening back is that he really is. He just has such an unusual voice, it's not like the singing that you hear when you think of a standard bluegrass singer—you think of them a certain way, with very strong, clear voices. However, I listen to Jerry on the CD and think, 'This is really moving.' He has a tremendous amount of soul in his own style. He doesn't sound like anybody else; he sounds like him. When you listen to these songs, you feel: 'Wow, he's really emotive. He's really *him* doing the songs.' That's a big deal—to be yourself, to not sound like everyone else who does them."

Although the Hart Valley Drifters proved to be as fleeting as their ephemeral band name, fixating on their brief existence misses the point. In listening to *Folk Time*, one comes to appreciate the spirited, rollicking energy that these neophytes brought to bear while arranging and interpreting the sounds that captivated them. As Frankel affirms, "When we were playing, we weren't trying to become famous. We were playing the kind of music that wasn't going to hit it big. We just loved playing that music. It was the most important thing in our lives."

Bill McAlaine

Ross James

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

Jay Blakesberg

ROSS JAMES has only played Grateful Dead music for around seven years, which, in some ways, makes sense because he is just 29 years old. But what's surprising is that he's currently the tour manager for Phil Lesh & Friends as well as the executive director of Terrapin Crossroads, the restaurant and music venue owned by Phil and Jill Lesh. (The space was conceived as a West Coast version of Levon Helm's Barn, hosting similar style Rambles.) James, who moved to California from his native Michigan in 2010 and sought out any gigs available while his sister attended college at Berkeley, now plays an integral role in multiple settings celebrating the music of the Dead.

Looking back, he reflects, "I had no idea that the songs were that good before Terrapin started. I thought it was a big party scene, to tell you the truth. It's been truly eye-opening hearing how many great songs are in their catalog."

In recent years, he's become fully intertwined in the Grateful Dead's world, as evidenced by his immediate response when asked about the process of putting a Phil & Friends show together: "It's never the same twice—or once, really."

What was the live music scene like where you grew up?

I grew up just outside of Detroit and there was always a bunch of great shows to go see. From the time I was a sophomore in high school until I left for California, I was going to as many shows as I could—stuff like Lou Reed at Saint Andrew's Hall and The White Stripes right before they sort of blew up. Green Day was huge for me when I was a kid. When I was real young, that was the first band I remember digging and then, shortly after that, it was The Velvet Underground.

There was a club called Magic Stick where I used to see a lot of shows, and that's also where I first started learning how to do live sound. I remember just talking to the guys who would be mixing shows and trying to pick their brains and, eventually, I started working with them.

What was your first job in the music business and what led you to that job?

In 2004, I was working at a deli in East Lansing, Mich., and this guy came in with a shirt that had a production company logo on it. I asked him what they did and we started talking. He was looking for a video engineer—basically somebody to set up the video screen at shows and the video walls behind the band. That was my first job in the production side of life. From there, I started getting into live audio.

Can you talk about your introduction to the Grateful Dead's music and how that eventually led you to Phil Lesh?

I was living in Sacramento, doing sound and playing as much as I could, and I was on Craigslist looking for gigs and bands to play with. There was an ad that read: "Looking for a guitar and pedal steel player who likes Dave Rawlings and Larry Campbell." That's all the ad said. Those are two of my favorite players and I had just started playing pedal steel.

I responded to the ad and they responded back for an audition, where I met Brian, Phil's youngest son. The audition was at their house and I had never really listened to the Dead. I'd kind of avoided it because I didn't understand what it was all about. I get there and I see all these pictures of this guy with Warren Haynes and Jerry and all these crazy musicians all over the wall, and I'm like, "Where am I right now?"

I got the gig and I played with Brian for a couple of years. Then they were getting ready to open Terrapin. The Leshes and I were at a mutual friend's Christmas party and I said to Phil and Jill, "If you ever need any help down at Terrapin, I would love to be a part of it. What you're trying to build sounds really cool." It snowballed from there.

What responsibilities did you originally have at Terrapin?

At first, I was helping out with the audio and the video for the web streams that we were doing at the Phil Lesh & Friends shows. I was also working with Robbie Taylor, who is Phil's production manager. I was his assistant, in a way.

I was also playing, so when we did the soft opening where it was four shows in the restaurant with Jackie [Greene], Grahame [Lesh], Nicki [Bluhm], Railroad Earth and Bob [Weir], I was learning [Grateful Dead] songs because I'd never listened to the stuff before and I was playing guitar. That was quite a trip.

How did you progress to your current role as Phil's tour manager?

As Terrapin Crossroads has grown, my role has changed. After being a production assistant, it grew to me just being a musician for a year, where I was playing as much as possible. During that time, Brian and I were also booking all of the music in the bar as that grew.

When we first started out, we would just have random shows. Phil would give me a call in the afternoon and be like, "Hey, you want to play a show with me and Jackie tonight?" That was how low-key it was, and it's grown into a full thing where we have two or three sets of music every day at the bar.

Brian and I started booking those shows. Now we have all kinds of outside bands coming in and doing shows in the Grate Room, which we didn't used to do in the beginning, so I took care of those bookings as well. We also do outdoor shows now—we basically put on a small festival once a month during the summertime. We're just constantly growing and changing, so I step in and help out with whatever needs to happen.

I handle the tour manager duties for all the road trips and help out with the production needs as well. Jill is pretty much Phil's business manager, if you will. At one point, they were looking for a new tour manager—this was around

Continued on page 79

Dams of the West

Youngish American Vampire

When Vampire Weekend returned home from their most recent tour in 2014 and settled into their current, unofficial hiatus period, drummer Chris Tomson got to work on a new project. But the wheels took some time to start turning.

"Knowing I had some time off, I was not exactly sure what I was going to do with my life," Tomson says a few years later. "I had my childhood piano from New Jersey moved to my place in the city and sat at it for a number of months before anything happened. And then, finally, some songs started to emerge and they felt worth pursuing."

Those songs eventually turned into Tomson's debut solo album, *Youngish American*, under the moniker Dams of the West, which finds the multi-instrumentalist crafting thoughtful and personal lyrics about, as he puts it, "a lot of early-thirties bullshit." The tracks are solid, as can be expected from a member of the band responsible for 2013's near-perfect *Modern Vampires of the City*. But while he had plenty of ideas, Tomson says he needed some help transitioning from demos to studio cuts.

"I felt like I had cool parts, and I recorded them, but they sounded like poop," he says matter-of-factly. Cue producer-to-the-rescue Patrick Carney—best known as the percussive half of The Black Keys—who helped Tomson with the physical recording process. "He felt like a veteran, in a way, while I felt very new to it," says Tomson, who got the idea to contact Carney from Vampire Weekend bassist Chris Baio, who was in the process of supporting his own side project. "I couldn't have asked for a better person and partner to work with."

Vampire Weekend doesn't yet have a timeline as to when they will release more music, but Tomson confirms that "work has been done" and says that side projects are a positive thing for a band that's been around a while.

"Having other things outside of Vampire Weekend is healthy for us, personally, as we get a little older," says Tomson, who shares his excitement over touring around the new solo record. "I can say it's very different being in a band when you're 22, as opposed to 32.

"Whenever Vampire Weekend finally does come back, everyone will be recharged," he continues. "If we did nothing else and just did half-ass Vampire Weekend shit, then that would be a bummer for ourselves and our fans." ***Matt Inman***

Cris Jacobs

Gold Dust Man

Cris Jacobs spent almost a decade on the Mid-Atlantic jam circuit with Baltimore favorites The Bridge, which netted him a tour with Mike Gordon, a spot on *The Wire* and regular appearances at festivals like All Good, all before his 31st birthday. But it wasn't until his genre-bending sextet parted ways in 2011 that Jacobs started the journey that led to his new, soulful album, *Dust to Gold*.

After The Bridge's Thanksgiving Eve swan song, Jacobs put together another band, but he says that project quickly fizzled for a variety of reasons—kids, schedules and other common life obstacles. "I started playing solo a lot more out of necessity," he explains. "It started to develop into a *thing*, and I opened for Steve Winwood in D.C."

But, while playing on his own, Jacobs started rubbing elbows with Winwood and Sturgill Simpson. The guitarist describes the moment he turned on the stage to find the famed Traffic bandleader standing there, watching his set. "He basically came up to me afterward and said, 'That was great. Let me get your information. We'd love to have you on the tour later [in the year].' I didn't think anything would come of it, but they sent me an email a couple months later like, 'Here's the tour. Which [shows] do you want?'"

A similar situation happened shortly thereafter when Jacobs caught the eye of country music's newest outlaw. "I got off the stage and [Sturgill] came up to me and said, 'Dude, that was badass.'" A few dates with Strugill blossomed into a true friendship offstage. Jacobs gushes that Simpson is a "no-bullshit guy who just cares about the music and keeping it honest and genuine."

Jacobs, who still texts with Simpson about kids and life, says it was an "inspiration to see two guys who are both huge heroes do it the right way" as he worked to assemble his appropriately named collection of rootsy rock tunes, *Dust to Gold*. Recording with an ensemble that included drummer Dusty Simmons and bassist Todd Herrington (formerly of DJ Williams Projekt), Jacobs says their chemistry clicked right away.

"They're so funky and soulful and tasteful," he says of his bandmates. "They know how to serve a song, but they can also play funk as well as anybody, so it's really cool bringing that to my thing. We have this funky, Americana, soul, country thing going on which is really fun."

Though *Dust to Gold* marks the start of Jacobs' next chapter performing under his own name, he's still clearly interested in collaborating. He recently formed a new band with Dumpstaphunk's Ivan Neville and the longtime friends plan to release an album in 2017. "Playing with him has really been amazing," Jacobs says. "He's got soul like none other and he rolls out of bed with it." ***Rob Slater***

Emily Tomson (Tomson)

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Winterpills NORTHAMPTON, MASS.

ROUGH LOVE

Philip Price was two years into a solo acoustic career when he formed a band "a little bit by accident." That quintet, **Winterpills**, has now been together for over a decade, and their seventh album, *Love Songs*, was released in March. "There had been a lot of breakups, my dad had just died. It was kind of a rough time for a lot of the individuals who eventually made up the band," Price says of Winterpills' formation. "We kind of discovered that we had this whole other sound going on that was not at all like what I was doing by myself."

The five members (Price is married to keyboardist/singer **Flora Reed**) are based in the Northampton, Mass., area and Price says their rural environment informs the expansive feel of their songs, noting that music inevitably ends up sounding like the "natural world in which it's created." For *Love Songs*, Winterpills entered a professional studio for the first time to work with an outside producer, Justin Pizzoferrato (Dinosaur Jr., Thurston Moore). "He brought out whatever sonic heaviness we'd been doing in our live shows for a while," Price says. As for Winterpills' longevity, Price notes, "We've been so close to each other during so many personal ups and downs. It's pretty hard to not be friends."

winterpills.com ***Lilli Friedman***

King Llama LOS ANGELES

ECLECTIC CHALLENGES

Ryan Tanner Bailey gets almost as excited talking about his band's influences as he does talking about their music. The guitarist lists both heavy hitters and lesser-knowns in the rock, jam and jazz worlds, but it feels like he could go on forever. And you can hear it in his music. From Pink Floyd to Umphrey's McGee to Wes Montgomery to Armenian pianist Tigran Hamasyan—with a little Mars Volta thrown in for good measure—**King Llama** draw from an impressive range of musical styles to forge their own brand of acid-jazz and prog-rock. Bailey says that one of his biggest influences is Phish, and his band emulates the jam icons in both their exploration and their yearning to always push forward. "One thing that we do and strive for is to challenge ourselves," Bailey says. "When writing a song, if it's too easy to play, it's not good enough."

Their debut album, *Return to Ox*, was recorded in King Llama's hometown of Los Angeles with renowned producer and engineer Dave Schiffman, who helped capture the band's effervescent live sound. (One of the jams on the record was even inspired by a ticket vending machine in Germany.) Of the marathon session that birthed the release, Bailey says simply, "I guess we essentially lived on coffee for like 160 hours and just nailed it out of the park."

kingllama.com ***Matt Inman***

Joanna Chattman (Winterpills)

Madaila BURLINGTON, VT.

POST POST-JAM

"We don't necessarily identify as a straight-up jamband," **Eric Maier**, part of the newest Burlington, Vt., sensation **Madaila**, admits. While they don't willingly lean into the jamband label, they have no qualms about recounting their past adventures following another famous Burlington outfit.

"We were driving around with Phish when we were 17 and 18," Maier recalls. "Whether or not it's overtly present, there's a lot of that jam influence." Maier remembers playing in the pre-Madaila outfit Chamberlin and purposely straying from the jamband influence. "We were kind of resistant to it because we wanted to do something else and we didn't want people to start reducing us to that."

Madaila—an anything-goes psych-pop quintet that finds Maier teaming with primary songwriter **Mark Daly**—rose out of the ashes of Chamberlin. The two actually attended first grade together and started playing music together in high school in a jamband called Pale Moon. "That was super fun, classic, youthful energy and basement parties—getting super stoned, lots of jamming and all that fun," Maier reflects. Madaila burst onto the scene with *The Dance*, assembling a full band that also includes **Willoughby Morse**, **Dan Ryan** and **Jer Coons**. After sharing the stage with fellow Vermonter Grace Potter, as well as Mac DeMarco, Deer Tick, Delicate Steve and many others, the group dropped their sophomore album, *Traces*, in November.

"We were just trying to build off *The Dance*," Daly explains. "We wanted to make this one a little more ambitious and complex. I'd say it's a little more unique. It's more rocking than the first one."

Though Daly primarily tracked *The Dance* himself, *Traces* showcases the entire ensemble. "Everyone gets to shine and put their own spin and touch all over the record," he says. "It's definitely more conceptual and freakier and psychedelic and philosophical, but it still has a lot of catchy and danceable tunes."

Daly and Maier are quick to gush about Burlington, even giving back to the community with Madaila on Main, a festival featuring numerous local acts. They will return home to ring in 2017 with a spot at Higher Ground and routinely make it a point to visit the Nectar's stage, the very venue where another Burlington outfit honed their chops during their formative years. **musicofmadaila.com** ***Rob Slater***

Rafi Bookstaber ASHEVILLE, N.C.

AVANT-GARDEN FOLK

It takes a keen sense of musical cartography to trace the vast freak-folk scene's path. But, nowadays, if there's anyone who can lend a hand, it is—without a doubt—Matt Valentine of MV & EE. So when you receive word of an album along with a note penned by MV himself telling you it makes him want to "hug life," you listen up. Such is the case with *Late Summer*, the new album by Asheville-based artist **Rafi Bookstaber**, who belongs to MV's network of collaborators known as The Wolfpack.

Late Summer, released in July on Woodsist, finds Rafi slicing from a more digestible pie. Previously, his recorded output consisted of abstract analog recordings, which clocked in as long as several minutes and as short as several seconds. They were very weird, but had a magical sound reminiscent of Bruce Langhorne's soundtrack to *The Hired Hand*.

It's what you might call experimental porch music: dusty and perhaps quite corroded and murky in places, offering up a mean, old splinter here or there, or even the comfort of a vintage rocking chair. "The length of the pieces, the recording quality and the various other production or technical aspects are as much a part of the music as any sound or chord or note or whatever," says Rafi. "It just dictates what it looks like a little bit by its own qualities—like starfish." **woodsist.com** ***Sam Davis***

Whitney CHICAGO

LOCKED & LOADED

After Smith Westerns broke up in late 2014, guitarist **Max Kakacek** and singer/drummer **Julian Ehrlich** happened onto a new sound while messing around with a tape machine. That happy accident became **Whitney**, an indie-rock duo that released their debut album, *Light Upon the Lake*, in June. "We realized we were onto something worthwhile as we were writing 'Golden Days,' probably the third or fourth song we completed," Ehrlich says. "The vision evolved as we were working on the songs. Honesty and vulnerability were the main themes we stuck to on *Light Upon the Lake*. Max and I made a huge point to keep everything unaffected and dry. The vocals have no reverb on them because we have no reason to hide them."

The pair, who are touring in the U.S. and Europe for the rest of the year, have since added several touring members to augment their live performances. "The band will probably always be Max and I demoing the foundations of the songs," Ehrlich notes. "However, forming the live band was so key to our path this project has taken. Everyone involved puts their own touch on the parts. I'm excited to test out new material after we have a few weeks off to see what they add to it." For both musicians, Whitney is a new chapter in their musical careers, giving each something that prior projects haven't. "More than anything, it has taught us to appreciate what we get to do and, because of that, we put a lot of work into the music and live show," Kakacek says. "Whitney is like a big family—which is something that I have not experienced in a band before." **whitneytheband.com** ***Emily Zemler***

Zach Deputy

Zach Deputy has been on his own "never-ending tour" ever since he broke onto the Southeast jamband scene almost a decade ago. But, this fall, the multi-instrumentalist had a special reason to hit the road—his fourth full-length release, *Wash It in the Water*.

The Bluffton, S.C.-bred, Savannah, Ga.-based Deputy laid down the 11-track record in a diverse mix of spaces, ranging from homes and garages to proper studios. Much like his one-man performances, which are known for their extensive use of live looping, Deputy played all the instruments on *Wash It in the Water* himself.

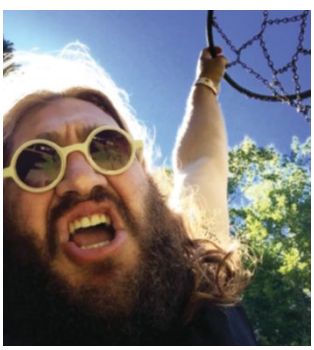
This September, Deputy brought his signature mix of folk, pop, hip-hop, funk, and soca and calypso rhythms to clubs and festivals up and down the East Coast and even popped into Florida's Full Sail University for a guest lecture. He took some careful notes for *Relix* along the way, offering some live, backstage and on-the-court highlights.

Laughing and spreading positivity with fans. *(Photo by CJ Portolese)*

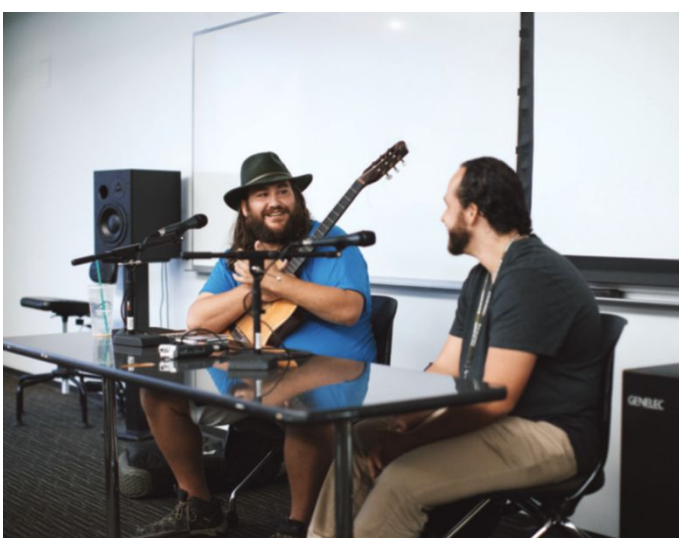
Live at Culture Room in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., 9/14/16.
(Photo by Carly Cris – Snappin' Necks)

Sharing hugs with a fan at Wormtown Music Festival, 9/16/16.
(Photo by JMS Art & Photo)

Mining for Herkimer diamonds in Fonda, N.Y., on a rare day off.
(Photo by Zach Deputy)



Staying fit on the road in style and getting some hang time.
(Photo by @lionthelion)



Guest speaking for music and entertainment business students at Full Sail University, where I also offered an acoustic performance, 9/15/16.
(Photo by @lionthelion)

Keeping in touch with fans during some downtime backstage at The Social in Orlando, Fla., 9/15/16. (Photo by @lionthelion)

The rig at The Social in Orlando, Fla., 9/15/16. (Photo by @lionthelion)

Pre-show laughs backstage to get the vocal chords warmed up. (Photo by @lionthelion)

Checking out the new merch. (Photo by @lionthelion)

Live at The Social in Orlando, Fla., 9/15/16. (Photo by @lionthelion)

Live at Jannus Live in St. Petersburg, Fla., 9/17/16. (Photo by @lionthelion)

Setting up and having fun with the new Zach Deputy tour scrims during soundcheck at the Rex Theater in Pittsburgh, 9/27/16. (Photo by @lionthelion)

Hiss Golden Messenger

BY RYAN REED

"I FEEL LIKE MAKING *Heart Like a Levee* and composing these songs was putting me to the test, putting my feet to the flame in a way I hadn't experienced before," says M.C. Taylor, mastermind of Hiss Golden Messenger.

For the past decade, the California-bred, North Carolina-based singer-songwriter has maintained a delicate balancing act between his growing family, day job as a folklorist (doing state-sponsored ethnographic field recordings) and commitments as a professional musician. The early days were simpler, as Taylor maintained a low profile with his homespun, lo-fi country-folk. But he slowly developed momentum with a series of acclaimed LPs—including 2013's *Haw*—that branched into jazz, R&B and psychedelic rock.

Two months into the touring cycle behind 2014's *Lateness of Dancers*, his fifth album, Taylor took the plunge into life as a full-time musician. "That can't help but change a person's relationship to their art, when they're depending on it to make a living," he says. "That change had reverberations throughout my life because it meant that touring, which was previously sort of optional, became something of a necessity. That put a lot of things in my life in pretty stark relief. At the time I put out *Lateness of Dancers*, my daughter was probably six months old."

These themes—family responsibility, the joys and sorrows and crushing loneliness of life away from home—run throughout Taylor's catalog. But the soulful, eclectic *Heart Like a Levee* emphasizes them with more clarity and vulnerability than ever before. "Someone asked me if I agreed with the notion that this was my darkest album, and that question took me by surprise," he says. "This is a really bittersweet collection of songs.

"The flip side is that there's been a lot of joy in the process," he continues. "Having the time to really concentrate on my craft, I came up with songs that are as powerful as any I've written. They show me something about myself that I don't feel like I've seen before. These songs are definitely a way to deal with the pleasure I get out of playing music but also the guilt that I feel doing something that I love—sometimes to the exclusion of everything else in my life."

Hiss Golden Messenger pushed themselves sonically on *Heart Like a Levee*, veering from the twangy classic-rock stomp of "Tell Her I'm Just Dancing" to the slow-burning, Curtis Mayfield-inspired funk of "Like a Mirror Loves a Hammer" to the eerie psych-rock orchestrations of "Ace of Cups Hung Low Band."

"It's maybe the alias for Hiss Golden Messenger, the morning after a show," Taylor says of the latter track. "It's my *Sgt. Pepper's*, but it's a busted, wrecked collection of people together. And it's celebrating that: the fellowship of being together and traveling together and making music together and doing our suffering together, fixing our amplifiers together. The very end of that tune, I got to tap into the more 'out' stuff that I love—like John and Alice Coltrane and the Art Ensemble of Chicago."

Working with his reliable studio crew—including Megafaun mainstays Brad and Phil Cook, Bon Iver drummer Matt McCaughan and vocalist Tift Merritt—Taylor stressed rhythmic impact, implementing saxophones and chasing the lost art of "swing."

"I have always been trying to make this record," he says. "Part of it is that I've grown up and learned how to incorporate things that speak to me and all the music that I love—how to put those things into my own music in a way that doesn't sound like I'm playing dress-up.

"Rhythm has always been a huge thing for me, and that doesn't always come through," he continues. "But on this record, we spent a lot of time working with the rhythm section to really get everything in the pocket and swinging, even tunes that are on the slower side. The not-so-hidden secret to making powerful and competitive records is they have to swing. If there's anything that's gotten lost over the past 25 or 30 years, it's that people have forgotten how to, or lost the ability to, swing a tune."

Taylor sounds excited as he gears up for rehearsals, but his deep sighs convey the stress and worry that one might expect from a man still adjusting to his all-in lifestyle as a professional musician.

"I definitely find myself sometimes playing down the absolute joy I get from playing music around people who are not full-time musicians," he says, tracing his career path in that now-signature bittersweet way of his. "It's a complicated life, but, man, playing music for a living...I could complain until my face turns blue, but I won't do that. I'm very lucky. I live my life on the fringes, for sure. But it's important to me for my kids to see their dad doing something that he's totally obsessed with. I can't say that I had that in my life growing up. I'm so thankful my kids can see me grapple with this thing that's so big and so all-consuming in my life. It really brings me a lot of pleasure."

Regina Spektor

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

IT'S A RAINY TUESDAY morning and Regina Spektor is at home in New York, gearing up for the release of her seventh record, *Remember Us to Life*. The misty weather is a fitting backdrop for Spektor's latest full-length LP, which finds the 36-year-old singer-songwriter balancing her lyrical, piano-based indie-pop with string flourishes and some of the darkest textures of her career. Though Spektor isn't a stranger to the album roll-out process, it's been a few years since she was fully in the belly of the beast.

"It doesn't feel like I took that long of a break," Spektor admits, tracing her busy schedule since 2012's *What We Saw From the Cheap Seats*. "That record came out four years ago, but I toured behind it for a few years."

But she's also quick to admit that a lot has changed during the past four years. In July 2013, she scored a fervent new audience when she provided the infectious theme song for the Netflix smash *Orange Is the New Black* and, eight months later, Spektor and her husband, former Moldy Peaches guitarist Jack Dishel, welcomed their first child. (Her list of collaborations is certainly diverse: Before *Remember Us to Life's* release, she also contributed to an early version of Chance the Rapper's "Same Drugs." Though her vocals ended up on the cutting room floor, the hip-hop festival-favorite tweeted: "Not using this may be my biggest mistake.")

"It was an incredible influence and inspiration," Spektor says of becoming a mother. "I'm not able to fully express it, but I feel it."

Remember Us to Life is far from a diary entry about her family, but the 11-song collection was shaped by her recent experiences and new perspectives. In the past, Spektor has stockpiled songs and sorted through them when she was ready to sculpt a new album. However, this time, all of the album's numbers were written during a finite period, beginning with the hushed piano ballad "Obsolete." "It definitely set the tone for experimenting with piano sounds and live processing," Spektor says, "and also just the vibe of the record."

Spektor's music has always had the ability to balance personal vignettes with more universal reflections in a truly unconventional way. She was born into a Russian Jewish family during the Soviet Union's final years and fled Moscow for New York in 1989, at the tender age of nine. Her family planted roots in the Bronx, where Spektor was able to practice her religion freely and explore the city's cultural melting pot with a unique perspective. She continued to study piano and eventually settled into the anti-folk scene that developed at Lower East Side Manhattan clubs like SideWalk Café around the new Millennium. Though Spektor's early self-released records were more jazzy, her 2004 major-label debut, *Soviet Kitsch*, and her polished, true breakthrough, 2006's *Begin to Hope*, laid out the blueprint for her quirky pop twists. From the start, she's had the ability to evoke honesty and introspection without veering into conventional coffee-shop balladry.

Between tours with acts like The Strokes and Kings of Leon, which aligned her equally with indie-rockers and more nuanced songwriters, Spektor continued to release a steady stream of critically acclaimed albums. She even made a fan out of Trey Anastasio, who asked to have lunch with her in New York a few years ago. "He invited me to see them at The Forum [in Los Angeles]—I felt kind of guilty getting to go backstage at The Forum at my first Phish show when all these huge Phish fans were there," Spektor says, referring to a picture she took with the Phish guitarist at a 2015 performance that went viral. "We talked about songwriting and, hopefully, we can do something together in the future."

Given her music's often-theatrical feel and lush piano soundscapes, it isn't surprising that Spektor's songs have been featured in a number of popular television shows over the past decade, including *How I Met Your Mother* and *Girls*. And Spektor reached her biggest mainstream audience three years ago when Jenji Kohan commissioned her to write the theme song for *Orange Is the New Black*, "You've Got Time" —an extended, pulsating rocker that sets the tone for the program as gritty images of partially faceless prisoners flash by. Kohan and Spektor shared a mutual admiration before the project; the singer had even covered the theme for another one of the showrunner's cult hits, *Weeds*. In order to capture a show still in production, Spektor says she watched rough edits of the episodes.

"The initial idea for the song came from a conversation with Jenji and her recounting a few stories from the show," she says. "However, I actually got to watch all the episodes of season one in full, as they were uploaded after being filmed and edited, in order to complete the song. So the whole season worked as inspiration for the song and the vibe."

After taking a break from writing during her pregnancy, Spektor started in on *Remember Us to Life* with producer and multi-instrumentalist Leo Abrahams, who is best known for his work with Brian Eno. *Remember Us to Life*, whose title is taken from a prayer traditionally recited during the Jewish High Holiday period, is a collection of individual snapshots that jump from the '80s-inspired, lightly beat-driven "Bleeding Heart" to the brooding, pounding "The Trapper and the Furrier" to the airy, morning meditation "The Light" and the intimate story-song "Sellers of Flowers," which looks back on Spektor's own youth. Yet the album's myriad songs are tied together by their use of string arrangements.

"I have always loved experimenting with strings and having them as part of my live shows in different configurations but, with these songs, I wanted to experiment more with arranging in different ways," she says, summing up her varied approach. "We experimented with arranging for layered strings, for trios and quartets. We worked with an experimental cellist who specialized in getting unique tones and sounds out of her instrument, with upright bass, and even had one of our minimalist arrangements arranged by a British composer for a full orchestra. There were samples and synth strings, too. It was an attempt to make strings speak in many different ways and to express what was right for each song."

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Lotus' Jesse Miller

After years of pop flirtation, the livetronica quintet turns in a set of vocal tracks equally suited for the dance floor and the festival circuit.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

Mike Greenfield, Luke Miller, Mike Rempel, Chuck Morris, Jesse Miller (l-r)

DANCE YRSELF CLEAN

[My brother, Lotus guitarist] Luke and I started writing *Eat the Light* around 2013. We had some initial demos going for what eventually became "Fearless." That set the mold for this record, and we wrote around that template—going into textures that were pretty dancey with more pop arrangements, some disco influences and vocals on every track. In a lot of ways, this album is much less electronic. Even the analog synths we use have more of a '70s feel. We always want to go down so many paths, but we try to create a cohesive style on each of our albums that helps us guide our writing process and production approach. For this one, we wanted something upbeat and fun because it was a little bit of a contrast from what we'd done on our past couple of albums. We had never done a full album of pop song structures.

EVALUATING AND EVOLVING

We're never strictly writing an album or on tour—we're always jumping between the two. Sometimes the tracks get drawn out over a couple of years. We'll do different versions or continually rerecord them. This time we didn't play anything live because we wanted the solid studio version to be the first thing people heard. We spent more time on the compositional end, working songs up over the course of a few years rather than whipping something out really quickly and trying to insert it into our show. Luke and I were constantly evaluating and evolving the tracks, and what we would always come back to was, "Is it hooky enough? Is it gonna be stuck in your head after two listens?" We've started to take these songs out and improvise more live, but the hooks and choruses still give us that foundation to move away from and then come back to.

NEW VOICES, CLASSIC IDEAS

We have our demos pretty worked out when we go into the studio so it doesn't become this game of writing and patching a bunch of random parts together. We try to do most of the experimentation, as far as the composition, beforehand. Most of our sessions took place at Miner Street Recordings in Philly. Their aesthetic approach works well for us. They've got a tape machine and a lot of old gear, but they can also use Pro Tools and create that hybrid. We tracked the album as a band in Philly—we'd do the drums, bass and guitar all at once, and then the keys and percussion later on. For the vocalists, we'd either bring them in for a session or I would do a session in my own studio. With Oriel Poole on "Anti-Gravity," we had a producer friend of ours record him in LA. In pretty much every case, we were writing songs and demoing the vocals before we had the singers. In some cases, we did go through a couple of people before landing on the final singers.

STOP MAKING SENSE

We did two "Talking Heads Deconstructed" shows [in 2014], and that played a part in the way this album sounds. Gathering of the Vibes approached us about doing something different than a normal Lotus set. My original idea was much more obscure, but we landed on this idea of remixing Talking Heads songs in different styles—mixing them in with Lotus hooks and riffs so we had these mash-ups throughout the set. It went over really well at the festival, so we decided to do another set when we played Red Rocks later that year.

Talking Heads has been a big influence for us since the beginning. If you look at their transformation from this really minimal, quirky, new wave/punk band into this 10-piece, you can see a lot of similarities to the way Lotus' sound has progressed. We've looked to them to find these musical ideas and interesting grooves that aren't too proggy and are rooted in this naïve approach to music—switching up instruments and having that be the guiding principle. Even though I have a degree in music, I think getting back into that really simplistic approach often yields better results. We had so much fun doing those shows with [vocalist Gabe Otto] and being able to hit these choruses that people could sing along with, and we brought that to the songs we were writing. I hear Talking Heads the most in some of the album's guitar patterns, where there's really thinned-out, rhythm-guitar parts, and the driving nature of some of the beats we use. It was also great to get Gabe on "Eats the Light."

OK COMPUTER

What's changed [in live music] is the ability to use computers onstage. Even acoustic bands have playback tracks. When I was young, you'd sometimes hear bands whose studio albums were super powerful and their live show wasn't quite there. The two sides that Lotus has always tried to approach are: How do we make this sound as good as possible while maintaining the ability to deconstruct things and give stuff a live feel? I really love Tame Impala's studio records, and we've been playing "Elephant," but their live show hasn't been very engaging to me because they're adhering to their studio records too closely.

STATE OF THE UNION

I go to a lot of small shows—off-the-radar stuff—but I'm really into the last Neon Indian album. I also really like a lot of classic indie guitar rock—like Spoon and Built to Spill—that came out of that minimalist, Krautrock tradition. And I've been going back into my record collection and getting more into my jazz stuff from the '60s, and funk and jazz from the '70s. We played with [original drummer] Steve Clemens in August when Mike Greenfield's wife was having a baby and we needed a few subs. He was a little nervous at the rehearsals, but then onstage, he got back to those grooves pretty quickly—there are certain feels to these songs that just came very naturally to him. We also had Jeff Peterson out and he did a fantastic job of filling in. It's interesting to hear a drummer's slightly different takes on a song because we have played this music for so long—"Umbilical Moonrise" was around before I was even in the band. It influences how you approach it.

Umphrey's McGee

Zonkey BY DEAN BUDNICK

Monster Mashers: Brendan Bayliss, Ryan Stasik, Jake Cinninger, Andy Farag, Joel Cummins, Kris Myers (l-r)

Jeff Kravitz

ON OCT. 31, 2008, at The Warfield in San Francisco, Umphrey's McGee debuted a series of mash-ups that have come to define the group's Halloween performances. As guitarist Brendan Bayliss recalls, "There was a DJ [Zebra] who did 'Come Together' by The Beatles with 'Come Closer' by Nine Inch Nails. We were on the bus and I think it was [bassist Ryan] Stasik who said: 'Why don't we learn this and play it tonight?' We did it [on 2/13/08 at Crash Mansion in Los Angeles] and later, when we needed something for Halloween, we said, 'Why don't we just do our own mash-ups and we'll have a costume theme tied into it?' So we did 'Another Brick in the Wall' with 'Thriller' and that started the whole thing from there."

Umphrey's has now collected a dozen of their favorite mash-ups on their new album, *Zonkey*. The band recorded new versions of these songs in the studio, using their live performances as reference points. "We started with a live version and Kris [Myers] went into the studio and played a real drum take to that version. Then, once we got the drum take, we went in and layered everything else," Bayliss explains.

As for how long it originally took the band to learn the material on *Zonkey*, he says, "It depends. It's hard when you get six cooks in a kitchen. There's a lot of opinions—'Let's try this, let's not try this,' and we tend to have a 'Let's try something before we say no' policy, so it takes a long time. For the ones that I would come up with, I'd make a chart on my own and I would show up to rehearsal and say, 'Let's try it like this,' to eliminate a lot of the political correctness of saying yes to every idea. Sometimes, if we just have some song ideas with no form or structure to start with, we sit in a room and then it takes a while to just come up with a chart for an idea that we can then take to soundcheck to see if it'll feel good."

When it comes to naming the results, Bayliss discloses, "That's when I step out of the process because I don't really care that much what the song is called; I care how it sounds. Joel [Cummins] really gets into that. He has come up with the names for most of them. Sometimes Joel will make a master list and he'll send an email out so that if anyone feels strongly about something, they'll respond. But Joel spearheads naming them, unless they're so obvious that they name themselves, like, 'Come as Your Kids.'"

The release of *Zonkey* finds the band in a legal gray area where it comes to clearing the publishing rights for the music. "There's no precedent for something like this," Bayliss acknowledges. "Technically, we're performing the songs ourselves and we're doing different lyrics, so [manager] Kevin Browning did a lot of research. He said he talked to six or seven different lawyers and got six or seven different answers. We had a meeting and we said there's a chance we could get sued for this, so we thought about calling the album *Let's Get Sued*.

"We sent a letter to every publishing company—it's weird because Michael Jackson's royalty rate is different than Frankie Goes to Hollywood's. The royalty rate, say, for a song with Michael Jackson and Pink

Floyd, is going to cost more than one with Rob Zombie. So, we contacted every publisher for every song and wrote them a letter, telling them what we were planning on doing. Then, we wrote everybody the initial check for, like, 41 cents a track. We'd actually lose money on some of these songs, if we sold them on iTunes, because of what we're paying in royalties. So, basically, we're assuming that we're showing enough good faith by contacting the publishers and writing the initial check. If anyone has a real problem with it they can write a C&D [cease and desist] letter, and we haven't received anything. We're hoping that, by going through the normal process of paying royalty rates, we've covered our asses. But we don't know, so I guess we're going to find out.

"I remember, at one point, right when we were almost done with it, I brought up, 'You know, guys, we have a really good thing going—we're all happy, is this worth the risk? What if this is a huge mistake?' Everybody kind of weighed the pros and cons. What's scary is my mother-in-law is a judge and she asked me a couple questions I did not have answers for. So she basically said if someone wants to take us to court, then it all depends on the judge, on their interpretation of the law. I worry about the Zappa estate and maybe Pink Floyd and Bob Marley. I would think that James Hetfield would think it's kind of funny and Kris did a good job emulating him."

Whatever ensues—and one has to hail the band's willingness to move forward, given the slightly fuzzy legal landscape, with such a commitment to the creative side, after pursuing due diligence and committing to fair royalties—*Zonkey* will commemorate the end of an era for the group. After the band's Halloween run in St. Louis this year, they plan on retiring the mash-up tradition, or at least put it in mothballs. Bayliss affirms, "We're going to do the record release, do the last Halloween mash-up, then put it to bed for a while and try to come up with something new."

"NATIONAL LOSER ANTHEM"

"National Anthem" (Radiohead) + "Loser" (Beck) + "In the Air Tonight" (Phil Collins)

I CAME UP WITH THE IDEA OF "National Anthem" with "Loser." A lot of it is trying to find songs that are similar in key and tempo, and both "Loser" and "National Anthem" are basically [in] D the whole time. There's no key change. So when you put them on top of each other, it's really easy to sing one over the other. I didn't realize, but the basslines are very similar, too. Then, once we got into a room and started playing one and singing the other, Kris Myers just did the most famous drum solo of all time, and once he did that, we said, "Yeah, we should probably put that song in, too." So that really just kind of happened, the third addition, which put it over the top.

"LIFE DURING EXODUS"

"Life During Wartime" (Talking Heads) + "Exodus" (Bob Marley) + "City of Tiny Lites" (Frank Zappa) + "25 or 6 to 4" (Chicago)

JOEL BROUGHT THE IDEA TO THE table and I didn't hear it—I thought it was a stretch. I also thought it was weird to have a bunch of white guys from the Midwest sing "Exodus." That was probably where my initial hesitation came in.

He said, "Trust me on this," and he started playing the "Life During Wartime" verse and asked me to start singing Bob Marley over it. Once I did, it was pretty obvious that it was awesome. I very rarely will admit when I'm wrong, and that's a time where I had to admit I was wrong. It turned into one of our better ones.

The initial idea was just those two and then, when we were charting it out, Jake [Cinninger] or Kris suggested "City of Tiny Lites" just because it's the same key, same tempo, and it fit. And then I think the Chicago "25 or 6 to 4"—we didn't talk about that. We played it live and we decided to open that part up. Jake started teasing the Chicago riff. So the version we picked had the Chicago tease in it.

"CAN'T ROCK MY DREAM FACE"

"Rock With You" (Michael Jackson) + "Can't Feel My Face" (The Weeknd) + "Dreams" (Fleetwood Mac)

STASIK REALLY WANTED TO DO something with "Can't Feel My Face" because he said, "It's going to be a dance party, chicks dig it and it's current." But then when it came time to do it, he didn't have anything else to go with it, so I started listening and I threw out Fleetwood Mac and Michael Jackson, and everyone said, "Let's do all three." It happened pretty easily.

For me, when someone has an idea for a song they want to do, I usually will go to Spotify or even scroll through song titles on the Billboard top hits of 1990s until something jumps out that seems like it'll fit. For some of these, I even dug out one of those old, archaic iPods that weighs 15 pounds and scrolled through. Like for the White Zombie one ["Thunder Kiss '65" which appears in "Frankie Zombie"], I dug through an iPod and that was the second to last artist. So it took a while to get there, but I got there.

"SAD CLINT EASTWOOD"

"Sad But True" (Metallica) + "Clint Eastwood" (Gorillaz)

That's another idea of mine where I thought that the "Sad But True" riff was awesome, but it's in D, so I was looking for something in E so we didn't have to detune every time we did it. I was going through an iPod, and I came across the Gorillaz. It seemed pretty obvious to me, but some of the other guys were kind of hesitant about it. Then, once we started playing that Metallica riff, it was almost funny. Once I saw the guys laughing at the idea, I knew it was gonna work, especially when Stasik started singing it. I was like, "Done."

"ELECTRIC AVENUE TO HELL"

"Highway to Hell" (AC/DC) + "Electric Avenue" (Eddy Grant) + "The Triple Wide" (Umphrey's McGee)

THIS WAS ANOTHER IDEA OF mine that was met with some pushback because some of these are so distant from each other. When you think Eddy Grant, you don't think Angus Young. I don't know if we even had to change the key—they're pretty close and the tempos are the same. The first time we played it, the crowd just went bonkers, so that's the last piece, even if we're kind of doubtful of something. If it goes over well, then it's all good.

It's weird when we go to a college campus and play a Huey Lewis song and some kids are looking at us like, "What the hell is this?" because they've never heard it. We think it's awesome because we grew up listening to that music. So I could see how Eddy Grant might be something like that, but there's something about that song—I don't know if it's been in commercials or on summer playlists—I think people are familiar with it.

"ACE OF LONG NIGHTS"

"Ace of Spades" (Motörhead) + "It's Gonna Be a Long Night" (Ween)

I was listening to Ween and that song came on and, in my mind, I went right to Motörhead because I thought it was so similar. Then, when I went back and forth, I think they were trying to give a tip of the cap to Motörhead. They were probably sitting around thinking, "We need a Motörhead song." If you listen to it, it's basically the same key, same tempo, same scream, same vibe. I could be totally wrong, but I think Ween wrote that song with Motörhead in mind.

"SWEET SUNGLASSES"

"Sweet Dreams" (Eurythmics) + "Sunglasses at Night" (Corey Hart) + "Electric Feel" (MGMT)

JOEL CAME UP WITH THAT ONE. That's one where we pulled out the *Greatest Hits of the 80s* and just started listening. It was super obvious because the bassline and the keyboard lines are almost identical and very much interchangeable.

I wanted to put MGMT in there just to make something current because those songs are so old and I was just thinking about doing something that kids would actually recognize. I'll admit that I think the MGMT is a stretch and I'll take fault for that one. I kind of forced that one in there and, listening back, I think it doesn't fit too much, but sometimes you can bend things to make them work.

"STRANGLETAGE"

"Stranglehold" (Ted Nugent) + "Sabotage" (Beastie Boys)

THAT ONE IS JAKE AND KRIS and Joel. I don't know which song came first; it was probably "Sabotage" and then Jake really wanted to do Ted Nugent because he loves Ted Nugent. He's a Michigan guy. We had to move down a whole step—I think "Stranglehold" is in A minor, so we had to move it to G because it makes it easier to sing for me and Kris. Kris had his hands full trying to be Ad-Rock. I was initially hesitant because I didn't think anyone would be able to do that vocal, but I think Kris did a great job on it. I was really impressed by that.

"COME AS YOUR KIDS"

"Kids" (MGMT) + "Come as You Are" (Nirvana) + "You Spin Me Round (Like a Record)" (Dead or Alive)

THAT WAS MY IDEA. MGMT was first, and then I was going through my iTunes playlist and I got to Nirvana. They're a whole step off, too. Nirvana is lower, so we had to raise Nirvana up to make it fit with MGMT. That was another one where I think the initial thought was, "OK, I can see how it works, but I don't think it's gonna work," but once we started practicing it, it was obvious.

"FRANKIE ZOMBIE"

"Thunder Kiss '65" (White Zombie) + "Relax" (Frankie Goes to Hollywood) + "Have a Cigar" (Pink Floyd)

I HAD LEARNED THE FRANKIE Goes to Hollywood song for a side project, The Omega Moos, which does a bunch of '80s tunes, so I had it on a playlist and Kris and Ryan had learned it, so I knew half the band already knew the song. That was another one where I pulled out an iPod and just scrolled through trying to find something, and then I got to White Zombie. What I'll do is have one on YouTube and then another one on Spotify, so I can space bar and go back real quick. If they're obvious, then I'll get an acoustic guitar and sing to the other, and if they fit, then it's on me to sell the idea to someone else.

For that one, I'm pretty sure we had a chart before we even got into a room. I showed up to rehearsal and said, "Let's try this," and everyone got excited about it and we wanted to make it more complicated and throw in a tag. There's a couple times where it goes—*[sings the White Zombie riff]*—so we threw in two of those to make it difficult for difficult's sake because we like to make things harder on ourselves than it should be.

When we got to rehearsing it, we felt good about it but I thought it needed something else. I played the "Have a Cigar" line to see if anyone would react well to it, and everybody smiled, so I knew it was good.

"BULLS ON THE BUS"

"Bulls on Parade" (Rage Against the Machine) + "Mark on the Bus" (Beastie Boys)

WHENEVER WE TRY AND DO these, I come up with four or five, just so I've done my due diligence. Then, once we start working on them, some of them, I realize, are kind of thin. And this is one where I didn't think it was gonna stick but everyone really liked it, I guess because that riff is awesome. You could play it for 10 minutes and it doesn't get boring. So I think that played into it and Kris loves singing that stuff.

"BITTERSWEET HAJ"

"Hajimemashite" (Umphrey's McGee) + "Bitter Sweet Symphony" (The Verve)

I SUGGESTED IT BECAUSE I always wanted to cover "Bitter Sweet Symphony." I brought it up once or twice and people didn't want to do it, so I figured if I could put one of our songs in it, then it'd be easier to sell. They're both the same key, same tempo and super interchangeable. You could literally sing one over the other, back and forth.

What was funny is, once it was done—and we started talking about whether or not we should release this record—we were talking about this one because The Verve got royally sued by The Rolling Stones because on the original recording, they lifted ["The Last Time"]. They didn't rerecord it; they just lifted it and the Stones took them to court and won. So once we were talking about releasing this one, I said, "How are we not going to get sued?" I didn't think we should put it on the album for that reason, but we'll find out.

Jeff Kravitz

Reed Mathis

Tea Leaf Green's erstwhile bassist is bringing Beethoven into the 21st century—and spawning an entirely new form of "classical dance music" in the process. BY BY DEAN BUDNICK

REED MATHIS GREW up in a family of classical musicians. His parents, grandparents and a number of aunts and uncles all pursued careers in the arts. But while the Oklahoma-raised Mathis shared their passion for producing sublime sounds, he gravitated toward jazz and rock orbits rather than exploring paths that would lead to an orchestral career.

The accomplished bass player was a founding member of the innovative, ever-evolving Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey, a group he first joined as a high-school student. He remained with JFJO through 2008, when he left the Tulsa-based collective to commit full-time to San Francisco rock group Tea Leaf Green. Mathis transplanted himself to the Bay Area and also found time to perform with the Marco Benevento Trio and join two projects with Bill Kreutzmann: 7 Walkers and Billy & The Kids.

This past August, Mathis announced his departure from Tea Lea Green in order to explore a new endeavor, which he dubbed Electric Beethoven. Over the preceding few years, he'd recorded Beethoven's third and sixth symphonies with a variety of other artists in three-piece parings, including: Page McConnell and Jason Smart, Mike Gordon and Joe Russo, Marco Benevento and Matt Chamberlain, Brad Barr and Andrew Barr, and Stanton Moore and Robert Walter.

Now, Mathis is taking the project on the road with the help of drummer Jay Lane (RatDog, Primus), keyboardist Todd Stoops (RAQ) and guitarist Clay Welch. The group uses Beethoven as a launching point for a heavily improvisational sound described as CDM (classical dance music).

As Mathis explains, "What we're doing live is not really what you hear on the record. What we're doing live is basically coming up with grooves as a group—dance units that we feel are hidden in Beethoven's chord progressions. This is the most engaged with the room I've ever had the privilege to be. In Jacob Fred, the improvising felt like being a ship at sea. We were interacting with the waves of the ocean and just trusting the audience to jump in the boat with us. With Tea Leaf Green, they had been playing for 12 years before I even met them, so they had a really established pattern and relationship that I was basically doing a variation on. It was the kind of thing where, because I hadn't been there when that music was birthed, they couldn't really follow me, but I could follow them in new ways, so the improvising was really like looking through a telescope on the wrong end. Along those lines, I think the audience was confused some of the time."

In order to offer a new spin on Beethoven's symphonies, Mathis hand-picked musicians who shared a certain set of emotional, physical and musical traits. "We're feeling our way toward grooves and we trust the audience to help us do it," he says. "For the first time in my life, I'm really able to open up to the whole room and allow the people in the room to be in the band and improvise with us and shape and navigate what's happening on the dance floor. It's a situation where the musicians have to be honest and have to be willing to fail and trust one another and forgive one another. We have to be brave and be curious, which is what we're asking the audience to do every night. Those people who are showing up are taking a huge risk. The least we can do is be as brave and as curious as the audience is."

I imagine you heard your fair share of Beethoven growing up. What led you back to him for this project?

When I was a kid, we didn't even have the radio on; we would mostly listen to my parents' classical vinyl collection. I didn't like most of it but, occasionally, some of it would grab my attention and I'd be like, "Dad, what's this? What'd you put on?" and he would say, "Beethoven." Eventually, I started noticing that every time I said, "What did you put on?" it was Beethoven, so I realized, "There's something about that guy."

I couldn't figure it out until much later, after I was pretty serious about music already, and was like, "What's different about that?" Jacob Fred had already put out a couple of records and I had been going real deep on studying the life of John Coltrane and Jimi Hendrix, and we'd been opening for Medeski Martin & Wood—this was back in, like, '95. I was getting turned on to this other level of improvised music that, in my opinion, even transcends genre. You can't really say that Coltrane is jazz or MMW is funk. It's like these guys took the blue pill and now they're past genre; they're doing something that can't be described.

One day, John Medeski was talking to me about Beethoven. I was like 18 and he was 30 when we started touring with them, and I can't believe how patient he was with me because I was like, "Hey, I got a question. Hey, do you ever... Hey!" because I had never been on tour before. I had just gotten out of high school. I heard him talking about Beethoven and I asked him some questions. My grandfather had given me a book called *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*, from the 1920s. It had been sitting on my shelf for years and when I got home from tour, I read it and it was incredible. It could've been a book about Coltrane or Bob Marley—one of these people who became a conduit, who

started out a normal person and somehow became a channel for something universal. His music had never been presented to me that way. I always just lumped it in with all other classical music.

So I read this book and I put on the third symphony. I remember the night like it was yesterday. I got super high and lit candles, and the third symphony made me feel like I was listening to a live Hendrix show. I started thinking, "There's got to be a way to play this music like he did." I always think of how Hendrix took up the electric guitar, but not like we do—when he picked it up, it was brand-new technology. It was 1958. He was basically picking up the absolute most modern technology and figuring out a new way to use it.

That's what Beethoven did, except now when you hear his music, people are doing a re-enactment, almost like a skit of what happened 200 years ago, which is the opposite of who he was. People present Beethoven's music like it's theater—like it absolutely has to be these instruments and it has to sound like this and you have to have a certain pedigree and you actually have to get permission from some authority to play this shit in the first place. And Beethoven was not that kind of guy. I read a dozen more books on him, and it became a quest for me to give Beethoven back his music—take it out of the hands of the reenactors.

Although people often think of jazz in a particular way, back in the 1950s and '60s, artists like Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins and Cannonball Adderley would rearrange Broadway tunes like "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top." What are your thoughts on how that came together and what it represented?

Well, "jazz," to me, can mean two different things. It refers to an era and everything that goes along with that era. A lot of people who play jazz play it a certain way, and they play stuff from a certain time period and use instruments that were popular during a certain time period. So the audience expects: "Oh, we're going to see a jazz band. They're going to wear suits and they're going to have a saxophone and a certain type of drum set." It's even gotten to the point where people say, "Oh, that's a jazz drum set," as if the music has a certain type of drum.

So that's one way to use the word jazz. The other way to use the word jazz—the way that I use it—is not as a genre; it's like a martial art that can be applied to any genre. It's the flower that blooms on any music when it evolves to a certain point, and it means supernova. It means something being born before your eyes. It means something so new that it's even scary. It means deliberately seeking out virgin territory. It means exploring, it means daring, and that's not a genre; that's a stance. You can take that stance in any genre. So, to me, that's what jazz means.

To me, somebody with a tenor saxophone playing *Giant Steps* sounds less like John Coltrane than Jimi Hendrix does. Jimi Hendrix sounds more like John Coltrane than some guy with a saxophone playing Coltrane's solo, note for note. Somebody playing a Katy Perry song on a washtub, and doing something creative with it, sounds more like Jerry Garcia than somebody with one of those guitars with the two outputs playing "Loser" in the exact way. You don't honor an innovator by copying them. You honor an innovator by innovating.

How do you think Beethoven would receive what you're doing with the live shows?

I don't think he would want to go see someone copy what he did 200 years ago. He was the greatest improviser of his generation, but there are no recordings. The stuff that we play is the stuff that he wrote down to sell. He improvised at every performance. The whole reason his career got going was because he was an improviser. He would go on stage after touring musicians and play back whatever they had just played and improvise on it. That was his shtick. In his 20s, he was that guy who would go up there and, almost like a rodeo clown, sort of humiliate whoever had just played by playing back whatever they just played, with no music in front of him, and improvise on that form doing variations.

He's the guy that would be rolling up and saying, "What's new here? What can you guys show me that's new and exciting? What's pissing off the squares?" He was that guy. That's why, in his lifetime, he was a local musician. He didn't play in other countries. He played in Vienna and that was about it. He wasn't a raging success. It was 50 years after he died that Wagner and Mendelssohn told the world: "Hey, you've got to check this guy out." During his lifetime, he was just a punk.

And that's even before he went deaf. After he went deaf, it just got even weirder because he began studying Indian music and African music and reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. He started writing stuff that was decidedly not European, but was truly amazing music. He was incorporating dance elements. He was incorporating vamps and backbeats and polyrhythms and claves and all this stuff that white culture had never heard of. They didn't think, "Oh, wow, how marvelous, how innovative." They thought, "Oh, isn't that sad. He's deaf. He can't hear how shitty his music is." My dad has this book that's a collection of Beethoven's reviews—eyewitness accounts and newspaper clippings—and it is astonishing to see what they said about him during his lifetime. The music press was extremely dismissive. The more creative and innovative his music got, the more they blamed it on him being deaf.

> "We're feeling our way toward grooves and we trust the audience to help us do it."
> **REED MATHIS**

But now, we put on the ninth symphony—he'd been deaf for 25 years when he wrote that—and it sounds like God having an orgasm. It doesn't sound like a mess to us because we understand backbeats and these elements that became American music because his music then traveled to New Orleans and was in everyone's ear when jazz was born. Then jazz was in everyone's ear when rock-and-roll was born and, now, we take for granted all those things that Beethoven was able to pioneer and unite between cultures.

I have a theory that improvising his music in the dialect that we currently use will completely work because we're still doing the stuff that he was experimenting with. His experiment worked; he just didn't live long enough to see it. His music traveled to America and then continued to morph, and we're the proof.

Stanton Moore, who appears on your album, has also described a connection between New Orleans sounds and Beethoven.

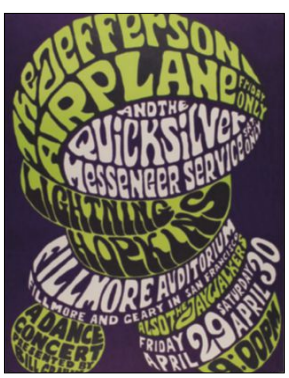
When I started putting this project together and contacting my friends and seeing who was down to give it a shot, I called Stanton and he was like, "That's so funny—I was just talking about Beethoven earlier today in a drum club," and I said, "You were? What do you mean?" He told me: "I mean, the second-line rhythm, the rhythm that's most associated with New Orleans drumming, is all over Beethoven's music." Then, he started sending me examples and I was like, "Holy fuck, I called the right guy because that's exactly what I'm trying to demonstrate and celebrate."

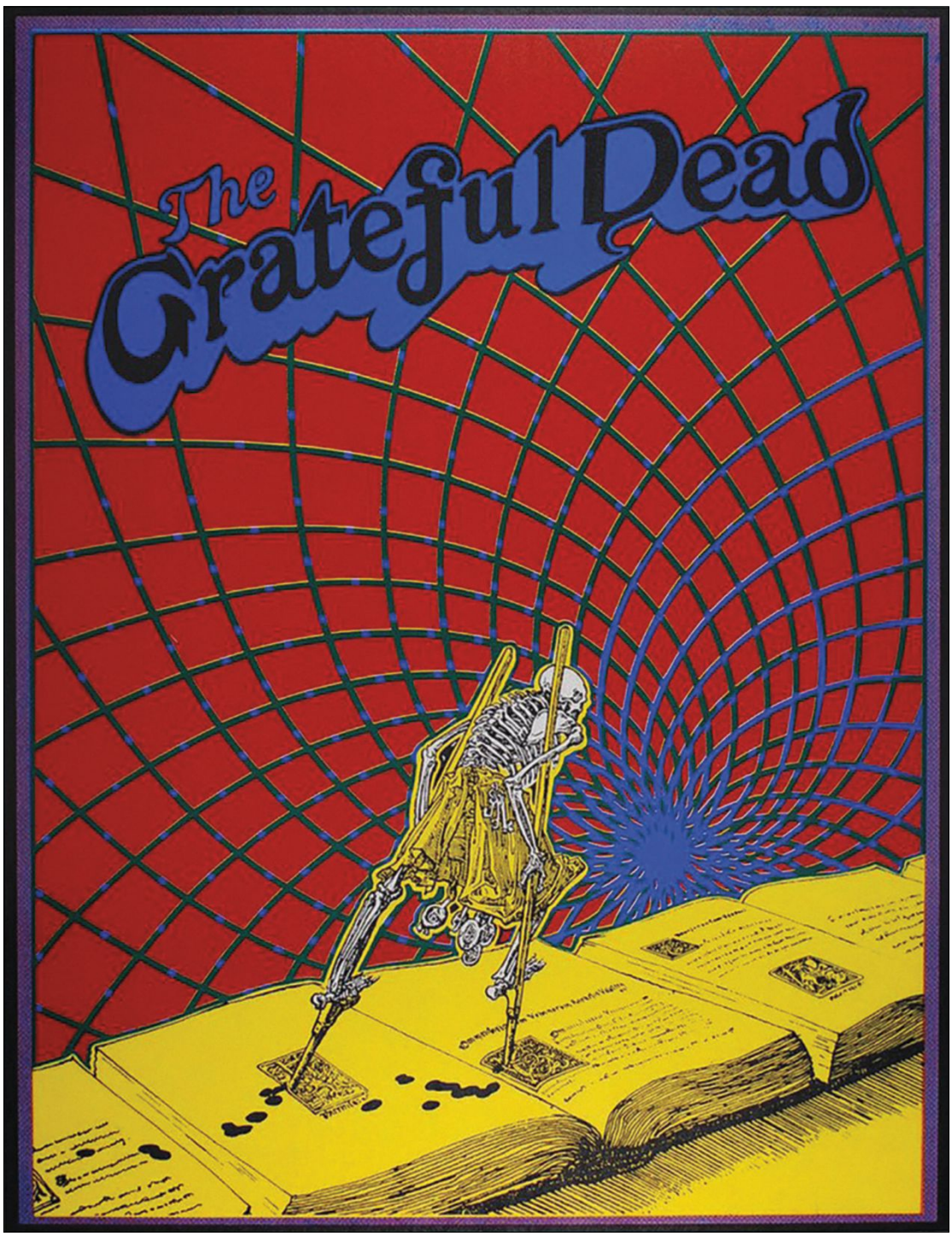
Some music has the potential to be evergreen. I believe the Grateful Dead's music is evergreen. I think that Bob Dylan's music is evergreen. I think that Radiohead's music will definitely stand the test of time, and Duke Ellington and Miles Davis and those weirdos. There's just some music that will only go away if we stop watering it. And I think that Beethoven's music is up there, and not because it's fancy but quite the opposite. It's universal.

THE 2016 *RELIX* HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Looking for a unique gift that will bring a smile to the face of a friend, loved one or even yourself? We've got you covered...

Psychedelic Art Exchange
The premier source to buy, sell and learn about 1960s psychedelic-rock concert posters, PAE is a full-service organization that allows users to buy and sell prints from the likes of the Grateful Dead, Cream, Jimi Hendrix, Traffic, Aretha Franklin and many more. **concertpostergallery.com**





1) SoloDallas

Join the worldwide legion of guitar players brought together by their love of rock-and-roll with gear from SoloDallas, an equipment company proudly used by Chris Robinson Brotherhood's Neal Casal, Warren Haynes, Angus Young, Eric Krasno and many other of your favorite guitar heroes. **solodallas.com**

2) Prayer Candle

Immortalize some of your favorite artists like David Bowie, Jimi Hendrix, Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir with a special prayer candle. Created by PurgatoryPenPals in New Jersey, these handmade candles use high-quality prints and crafty Photoshop skills. **etsy.com/shop/PurgatoryPenPals/items**

3) EarPeace

Never take your hearing for granted. The newest offerings from EarPeace cut the noise without losing sound fidelity so you can actually hear what you're listening to. The low-profile, comfortable and reusable earplugs will keep your hearing intact for years to come. **earpeace.com**

4) Smokey Amps

Perfect for busking in the street or playing in your garage, these amps made from your very own cigarette box can power any 4, 8 or 16 ohm speaker cabinet and can be used with an input of another amp as a fuzz box. **smokeyamps.com/product/recycled-cigarette-pack-smokey-amp**

5) Trey Anastasio Pedals

Ever wanted to emulate Trey Anastasio's unique, ever-evolving guitar tone? The people at Equipboard have compiled a list of the Phish guitarist's many pedals from his vast onstage setup, complete with 12 effects pedals to get you on your way to covering Phish's songs the right way. **equipboard.com/pros/trey-anastasio/#effects-pedals**

6) Rocky Mountain Slides

Check out these handcrafted, custom finger slides made from solid block clay and ceramic tone bars, with more than 1,000 finger slides to chooses from and over 680 tone bar combinations and counting. **rockymountainslides.com**

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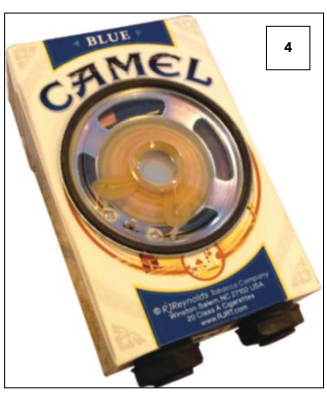

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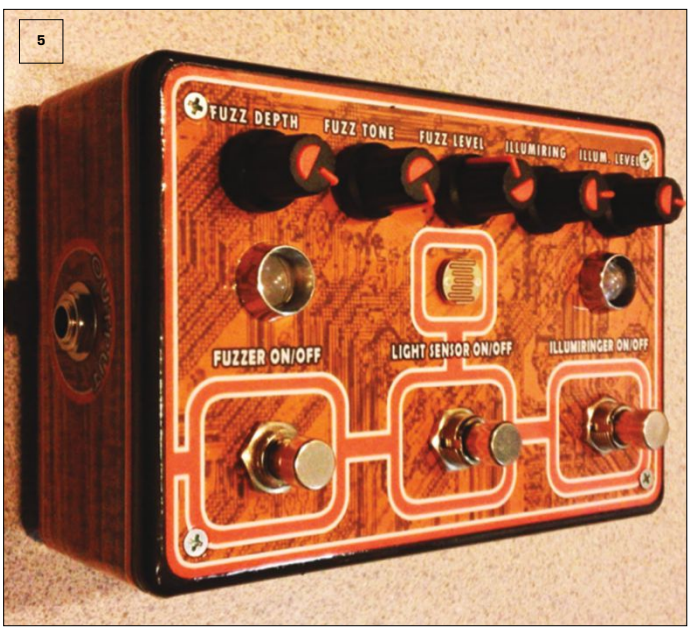

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1) GoPro Hero4

Documenting your music festival experience has never looked better as this portable camera records in crystal clear 4K and boasts playback audio equipped for the front row or the top of a large arena. With a powerful battery life, the GoPro Hero4 is your newest festival companion.
gopro.com

2) Reverb Limited Edition Handmade Pocket Amp

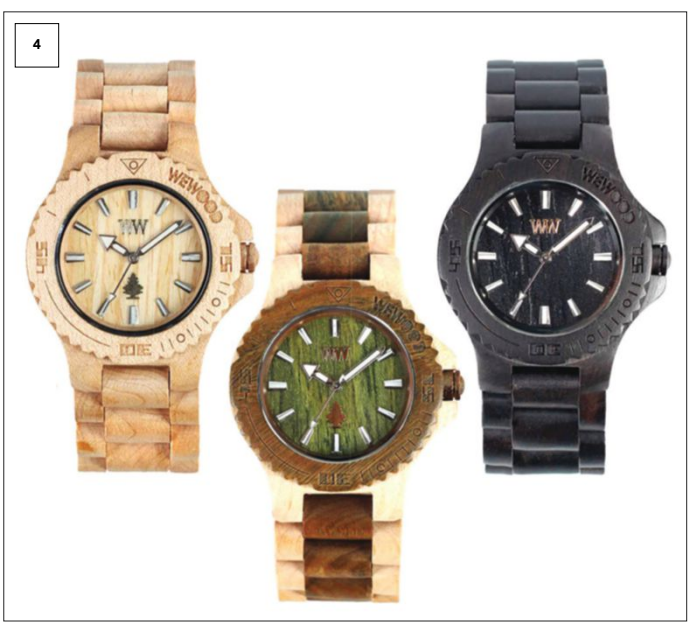
Perfect for packing for Bonnaroo or simply for an impromptu electric jam session, the Reverb Pocket Amp packs a punch in a package the size of an Altoids tin. Created by the musician marketplace Reverb.com in tandem with Tennessee's Deluxe Amplification, this amp is the perfect gift for the musician that's ready to plug in and turn heads at a moment's notice.
reverb.com

3) Mountainsmith Cooler Tube

Everyone should be able to enjoy a beer while relaxing. But carrying a six-pack is just awkward. Stash some frosties in this cooler tube and never again find yourself saying, "I wish I had a beer right now." **mountainsmith.com**

4) WeWOOD

WeWOOD collaborates with Trees for the Future, Treedom and American Forests to plant a tree for every timepiece purchased. Their goal is to help restore Mother Nature, one watch at a time. Since 2010, WeWOOD has planted over 420,000 trees with its partners and sets challenging targets for 2016 and beyond.
us.we-wood.com



5) Little Hippie

Although it's called Little Hippie, Taylor Swope and her team offer creative clothing for kids of all ages, including original designs and art officially licensed by Grateful Dead Productions.
littlehippie.com

6) Hot Vapes

Hot Vapes carries a wide range of products including e-cigarettes, batteries, chargers, atomizers, cartridges, clearomizers, vape tanks, vapor e-liquids and vaporizers. Stop by and compare.
hotvapes.com

7) Flash Tattoos

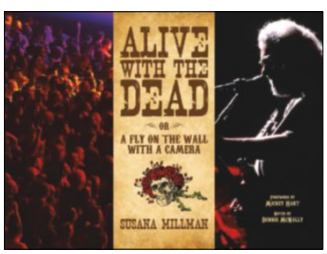
Check out the latest from the company responsible for launching the metallic tattoo craze with their innovative jewelry-inspired temporary tattoos.
flashtat.com

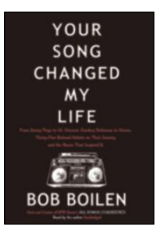
8) More Vapes

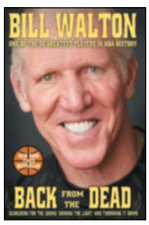
With so many options out there, we can also speak from experience and point you to the Pax 2, the Pulsar APX, the APX Wax, the Firefly 2 and the Atmos Transporter.
pulsarvaporizers.com
paxvapor.com/pax-2
thefirefly.com
atmosrx.com/transporter-dry-herb-vaporizer

1) Jammin on Haight

Jammin on Haight is San Francisco's premier stop for tie-dyed clothing and hippie ephemera. The store features current trends while also remaining true to the original psychedelic movement. Visit them *at* the corner of Haight and Masonic Streets in San Francisco, or stop by online. **jamminonhaight.com**







2) For the Festival of Lights, Give the Gift of Festivals

Be a mensch and treat someone (maybe yourself) to one of these upcoming warm-weather fests...

Los Muertos con Queso, Riviera Maya, Mexico, Jan. 25–28, 2017
The String Cheese Incident, Bill Kreutzmann & Bob Weir with Dave Schools, Jeff Chimenti and Tom Hamilton, The Chris Robinson Brotherhood & more
losmuertosconqueso.com

Castaway with Southern Ground, Riviera Maya, Mexico, Jan. 30–Feb. 3, 2017
Zac Brown Band, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Toots & The Maytals, JJ Grey & Mofro and more
zbbcastaway.com

For many more events in early 2017, check out:
cloud9adventures.com
http://cidpresents.com/

3) The Year of the Musician Memoir

There are so many to choose from, but here are a few of our favorites:

> Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run*

> Robbie Robertson, *Testimony*

> Maynard James Keenan with Sarah Jensen, *A Perfect Union of Contrary Things*

> Brian Wilson with Ben Greenman, *I Am Brian Wilson: A Memoir*

> Laura Jane Grace with Dan Ozzi, *Tranny: Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist Sellout*

> John Doe with Tom DeSavia, *Under the Big Black Sun: A Personal History of L.A. Punk*

> Phil Collins, *Not Dead Yet: The Memoir*

> John Popper with Dean Budnick, *Suck and Blow: And Other Stories I'm Not Supposed to Tell*

4) Books With Grateful Dead Connections

> Bill Walton, *Back from the Dead*

> Jesse Jarnow, *Heads: A Biography of Psychedelic America*

> Joel Selvin, *Altamont: The Rolling Stones, the Hells Angels, and the Inside Story of Rock's Darkest Day*

> Robert Greenfield, *Bear: The Life and Times of Augustus Owsley Stanley III*

> Buzz Poole, *Grateful Dead's Workingman's Dead*

> Michael Benson, *Why the Grateful Dead Matter*

> Jay Blakesberg, *Fare Thee Well: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Grateful Dead*

> Susana Millman, *Alive with the Dead: A Fly on the Wall with a Camera*

5) Other Tomes Well Worth Your While

> Bob Boilen, *Your Song Changed My Life: From Jimmy Page to St. Vincent, Smokey Robinson to Hozier, Thirty-Five Beloved Artists on Their Journey and the Music That Inspired It*

> Rich Cohen, *The Sun & The Moon & The Rolling Stones*

> Ben Ratliff, *Every Song Ever: Twenty Ways to Listen in an Age of Musical Plenty*

> Alan Light, *What Happened, Miss Simone?: A Biography*

> Peter Ames Carlin, *Homeward Bound: The Life of Paul Simon*

> Barney Hoskyns, *Small Town Talk: Bob Dylan, The Band, Van Morrison, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Friends in the Wild Years of Woodstock*

> Bob Mehr, *Trouble Boys: The True Story of The Replacements*

> The Mockingbird Foundation, *The Phish Companion: A Guide to the Band & Their Music*

6) The Relix Marketplace

Still unsure? Fear not, we still have you covered, from back issues to beanies to hoodies and hats, we have a variety of *Relix*-related items to warm your head and your heart. **relixmarketplace.com**

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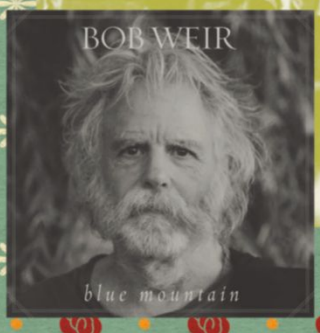


losmuertosconqueso.com

All packages include a copy of Bob Weir's new album Blue Mountain - in stores now!

REDEMPTION SONGS

The Devil Makes Three open up a portal to the past with a collection of old-timey tunes packed with a punk-rock bite. BY MATT INMAN

PETE BERNHARD is onstage at Brooklyn, N.Y.'s Rough Trade for a short matinee performance with his band in support of their new album that dropped a few days earlier. The Devil Makes Three guitarist and lead vocalist is flanked by childhood friend and banjoist Cooper McBean and their longtime bandmate and bassist Lucia Turino. The in-store session marks the soft beginning of their fall tour.

"Instead of being about killing yourself with drugs and alcohol," Bernhard announces in anticipation of the next song, "This one's about Jesus."

The trio then launches into their rendition of "I Am the Man Thomas," a tune written and originally recorded by bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley, which now finds a home on the "Redemption" side of The Devil Makes Three's new covers record, *Redemption & Ruin*. It's a collection of tracks written by artists ranging from Robert Johnson to Tom Waits, all of whom have influenced the old-timey-punk ethos that TDM3 have curated since the Vermont-by-way-of-California trio officially came together shortly after the turn of the Millennium.

The "Ruin" side of the album doesn't come as a surprise—throughout the band's first four studio albums and two raucous live releases, Bernhard has spun tales of drinking, drugs and self-destruction in his songwriting—but the "Redemption" side of things, which draws heavily from gospel tradition, might seem a bit more ill-fitting. But, as Bernhard says, in certain ways, he and his bandmates have been misjudged since the beginning, and they're just fine with that.

"A lot of times, when we talk to people about our band, they don't really understand where we're coming from," Bernhard says. That misunderstanding might start with appearances—Bernhard and McBean both sport tattoos that cover their left arms, which can be seen when they're strumming their respective guitar and banjo; McBean dons long hair, a bristly beard and ear gauges; and Turino occasionally reveals a large steer skull tattoo that stretches across her collarbones.

While one might expect some noisy, three-chord punk from such a trio, they instead deliver a hefty dose of rockabilly-influenced twang. "Musically, it's like a mystery to them," Bernhard continues. "'You're not this and you're not that—what exactly are you?' Personally, I think it's great when you can't figure out a band because that just means that it's something different."

This clash of styles made for an interesting start to the group's career. At their early shows, The Devil Makes Three paired with a wide variety of acts as both the band and bookers tried to figure out just exactly where this type of music fit.

"We didn't know anything about the regular touring scene, the folk music scene or anything like that," McBean remembers. "Pete had a copy of *Book Your Own Fucking Life*—a DIY-punk collection of email addresses and phone numbers—so we just started calling people and basically booked punk tours, playing in basements and living rooms between really, really fucking loud bands."

"I mean, we look like punks," Turino adds. "So they were sort of like, 'Alright, get in there.'"

For the most part, the punk scene tended to welcome the folky newcomers. "Some of the time, there were a lot of blank faces—like, 'What the fuck are these guys doing playing at a hardcore show?'" McBean says. "But the cool thing about the punk scene, at that point at least, is that people tend to have pretty open minds. They'd go to see a hardcore band, but if there was a weird folk band playing, they're like, 'Oh, it's cool.' Or they'd go out and smoke a cigarette—didn't matter."

"In those early days, we played with pretty much anyone who would let us on the stage," Bernhard adds. "We did some very strange gigs—everything from playing with a thrash-metal band that was on tour in California to playing with a totally Dead-inspired, one-song-is-40-minutes-long kind of band. Really, we'd play with anyone who would give us a chance."

On the other side of the spectrum, the trio also found themselves on bills with more traditional folk and bluegrass acts, which yielded mixed results from both fans and the bands themselves. "We got more raised eyebrows when we tried to play the super folky shows," Turino says. "Our music was very influenced by blues and bluegrass and old-time and jazz, but we're not traditionalists—we're not good enough to play a lot of that stuff the way it was originally designed to be played—so we made it our own."

"A lot of the people who were playing bluegrass during that time didn't really like the fact that we had a drummer," Bernhard says. "I think we were a little too hard-edged for that scene. We wanted people to dance, and we did a lot of, like, drinking songs. We had a hard time getting shows at first but, later on, it did really help us to gain momentum."

"But even then, back when we were young, most people were like, 'It's good to see young people [playing this music]. It's great that you guys are even trying,'" Turino says. And despite their unorthodox mash-up of genres, The Devil Makes Three have benefitted somewhat from folk and

Three of a kind: Lucia Turino, Pete Bernhard, Cooper McBean (l-r)

Giles Clement

bluegrass music's rise in popularity over the past decade and a half. Besides more pop-influenced bands like Mumford & Sons and The Lumineers, the art of traditional bluegrass has been revived and revamped by groups like Old Crow Medicine Show, Yonder Mountain String Band and Greensky Bluegrass, all of whom, like TDM3 themselves, face the challenge of interpreting pre-war music for a modern audience.

"One of the things I hope to do for the tradition in general is to keep the subject matter current, to try to talk about things that are relevant to what's happening now," Bernhard says. "It's our responsibility. Some people stick to the older things—they just stick to the 'old-timey' nature of the genre as far as songwriting is concerned. For us, I really try to write songs whose subject matter makes sense and will really grab people who are living on the planet Earth *now*. It's the only way we're going to keep this musical form alive. It can't just be us playing the songs that people played years ago. That's not gonna work because, eventually, people just tune out."

Bernhard credits the Grateful Dead with accomplishing this sort of preservation of classic musical styles for the modern listener, just up the coastline from where The Devil Makes Three first came together in Santa Cruz, Calif.

"Something I really hoped to do with our band was something that happened to me with the Grateful Dead," Bernhard says. "I listened to the Grateful Dead because I'm from Vermont, and the Grateful Dead is in the water—no one grew up here and didn't hear them. So, in listening to *American Beauty* and *Workingman's Dead* and *Old and in the Way*, I got into the music, but then I was like, 'Wow, where did these songs come from? Who are the artists?'

"The Dead, for me, was almost like a springboard into the music of the past," Bernhard continues. "I went back there and listened to all these great artists, and it woke me up to the musical history of America. They gave me this inroad. I would love to say that The Devil Makes Three could do the same thing."

Part of the impetus for *Redemption & Ruin* was to open up that portal for a new generation. In taking songs from blues legends like Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters and country songwriting icons like Hank Williams, Kris Kristofferson and Willie Nelson, the album acts as more of a direct quote, as opposed to the paraphrasing presented in past TDM3 efforts.

"One of the reasons for doing this is to point the finger and be like, 'Hey, our music's cool, but these are all the people that influenced us, and without these artists, we wouldn't even exist as a band,'" Bernhard says. "And even though the Grateful Dead isn't on the album, they are part of the reason why we've heard of some of the people who are. That was a big part of listening to the Dead for me—it was almost like a history lesson."

"It's just a way to pay tribute to the people we respect," Turino says of the album's goal. "Some of it everyone knows—everyone has heard of Hank Williams, and everyone has heard of Kris Kristofferson,

Continued on page 78

TRIPS FESTIVAL

From *Bear: The Life and Times of Augustus Owsley Stanley III* BY ROBERT GREENFIELD

Journalist Robert Greenfield, the author of numerous books including Bill Graham Presents: My Life Inside Rock and Out *and* Dark Star: An Oral Biography of Jerry Garcia, *returns to the San Francisco music scene of the 1960s with his latest work,* Bear: The Life and Times of Augustus Owsley Stanley III. *Born into Kentucky political royalty and the namesake of his paternal grandfather, who was a congressman, senator and governor, Stanley became the chemist who supplied LSD to Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters at the Acid Tests. His reputation soon extended across the globe and included accolades from Dr. Albert Hofmann, the first person to synthesize the drug.*

Greenfield's book, which is full of anecdotes and insights, tracks Stanley's life from his early days in the South through his final years in Australia. The following excerpt explores the onset of his relationship with the Grateful Dead, when he became the group's patron.

ON MANY LEVELS, the psychedelic '60s truly began at the Trips Festival held at Longshoreman's Hall at 400 North Point Street in San Francisco on the weekend of January 21, 22 and 23, 1966. Stewart Brand, who would go on to create the Whole Earth Catalog, came up with the original concept along with a musician and visual artist named Ramon Sender. With Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters as the featured attraction, by far the wildest of the three events took place on Saturday night.

Kesey, who had just been given a six-month sentence on a work farm as well as six months of probation for his marijuana bust at La Honda, had made front-page news in San Francisco two days earlier by getting arrested yet again along with his companion Carolyn Adams, aka Mountain Girl, for smoking a joint on the roof of Brand's apartment in North Beach.

No doubt, in part, to show their continuing support for Kesey, somewhere between 3,000–5,000 revelers, who were stoned out of their heads on LSD that Owsley had provided, jammed a hall that was only supposed to hold 1,700 people. In the words of Grateful Dead biographer Dennis McNally: "There were simply more people tripping in a single room... than anyone had ever seen before."

As Jerry Garcia would later say, "It was total insanity. I mean total, wall-to-wall, gonzo lunacy—everybody was just partying furiously. There were people jumping off balconies onto blankets and then bouncing up and down. I mean there was incredible shit going on. Plus, it was like old-home week. I met and saw everybody I had ever known. Every beatnik, every hippie, every coffeehouse hangout person from all over the state was there, all freshly psychedelicized."

What, with Hells Angels punching out members of other motorcycle clubs in the hallways as one of the Pranksters tried to force Big Brother & The Holding Company off the stage after they had performed just one song, the scene was so crazy that no one could control it. Which did not stop Bill Graham, who had only just begun putting on shows at the Fillmore Auditorium and had been brought on to help run the event, from doing all he could to stop the Pranksters from letting people in for free.

After running all over the hall with a clipboard in his hand in search of Kesey, Graham finally found him standing at the back door letting in a constant stream of bikers. To keep the law from knowing he was there, Kesey was attending the event in a silver space suit with a helmet. After trying, in vain, to get Kesey's attention, Graham finally lost control and began screaming at him. Without saying a word, Kesey simply flipped the visor of his helmet down and went right on doing as he pleased.

As Bob Weir of the Grateful Dead would later say of Bill Graham that night, "We were with the Pranksters and the buzz was, 'Who's that asshole with the clipboard?'" Aside from Jerry Garcia, with whom Graham would forge a lifelong bond on Sunday night by trying to put Garcia's shattered guitar back together so the Dead could play (which they never did), the only other person at the Trips Festival who understood what Bill Graham was all about was Owsley.

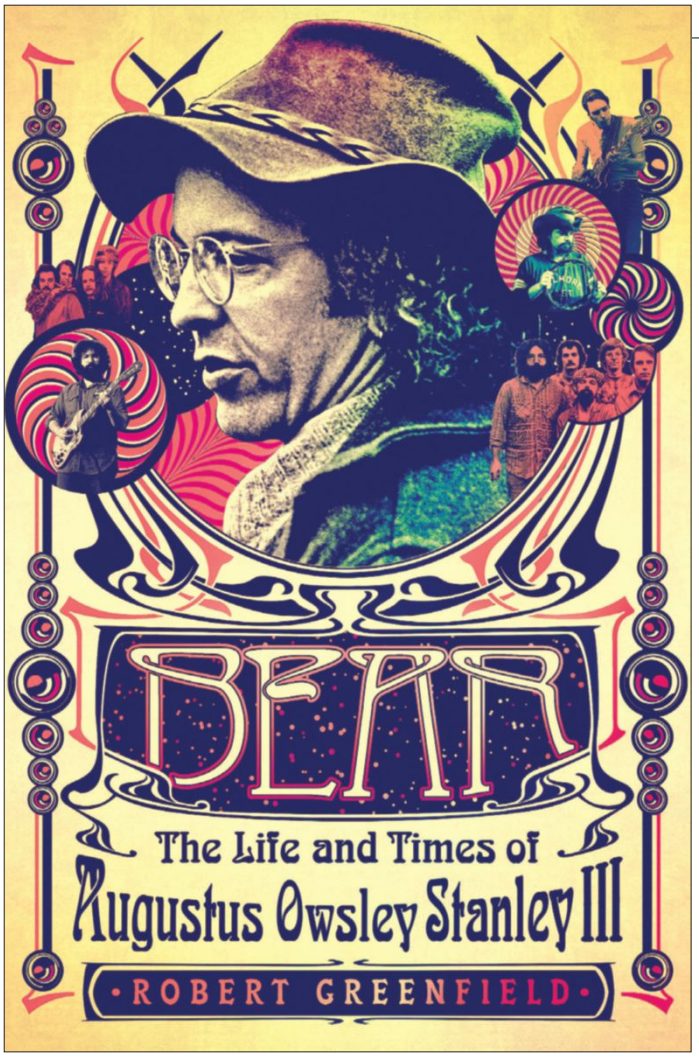
"It was completely out of control and he was trying to control it, and, of course, he couldn't because the harder you tried to grab it, the more slippery it became. I was real stoned when I came into contact with Bill, and I could see right through all the bullshit, and I realized he was half-terrified by what it was and he was doing everything he could to control it, and to suppress the realization that there was something special going on there besides something that was obviously making money."

Owsley brought Tim Scully with him to the Trips Festival. Then 22 years old, Scully had skipped his senior year of high school to begin attending the University of California at Berkeley, where he majored in mathematical physics. Having already built a small computer in middle school and a linear accelerator in high school, Scully had left the university in 1964 to work as an electronic design consultant.

A few hours after having mailed in his tax return on April 15, 1965, Scully had taken LSD for the first time. Possessed by the notion that acid was a better solution to society's problems than technology, Scully then spent months "tracking down the source of his dose," who was, of course, Owsley. After spending weeks carefully checking Scully out, Owsley brought him to the Trips Festival to see how he would react, and the two then began working together on assembling state-of-the-art sound equipment for the Dead as well as the wholesale manufacture of high-quality LSD.

One week after the Trips Festival, on January 29, 1966, Owsley joined the Grateful Dead at the Sound City Acid Test. During the event, held in a radio station in San Francisco, the band tried to record what they had been doing live to accompany the swirling madness created by the Pranksters. During the evening, Bob Weir "first sort of logged into Owsley. He was dressed in medieval garb, had a pageboy haircut and was wearing a ruffled shirt, and he was a dandy. Of course, I was loaded on LSD, so all that had its own little resonance with me.

"I was on Owsley acid when I met Owsley, and he seemed like one of us. I was 18 years old and he was as old as Kesey, at least 30, but they were both more like kids than most kids you were going to see. We connected right away because he was a very, very interesting guy and seemed to know



something about everything, and that appealed to me.

"If you got involved in a discussion with Owsley even back then, you kind of had to pack a lunch. I think Phil was his closest contact in the band. They had already bonded because they both had really high IQs and real good retention of information, and they were both really curious. Together, they added up to different kaleidoscopes, if you will."

Then 25 years old, Phil Lesh had attended Berkeley High School and the College of San Mateo before transferring to the University of California at Berkeley, where he dropped out after a single semester. Originally a violin player, he had also studied the trumpet and was an avid devotee of avant-garde classical music and free jazz. While working as an unpaid recording engineer at KPFA, Lesh had met Jerry Garcia, who talked him into becoming the bass player for the band that was then still known as The Warlocks. Unlike Garcia, Lesh had been formally trained and so could read music as well as write charts.

Lesh and Owsley had first connected with each other at the Fillmore Acid Test on January 8, 1966. Having last seen a completely freaked-out Owsley dragging a chair across the floor in Muir Beach, Lesh thought Owsley now looked "like a conquering hero or some Robin Hood figure out of swashbuckling antiquity." Wearing "an Aussie digger hat and a leather cape," Owsley seemed, to Lesh, "every inch the figure of the psychedelic warrior... a man who knows he's on to something cosmic and eternal."

Walking up to Owsley, Lesh extended his hand and said, "So, you're Owsley. I feel as if I've known you through many lifetimes." Immediately taking the conversation to another level, Owsley replied, "You have, and you will through many more to come." Lesh then felt as though he were living in Owsley's head, which may have been "the result of all the trips I'd taken using his product."

Never one to pass on an opportunity, Owsley then asked what he could do for the band. "Phil said they did not have a manager. Having no interest in that role at all, I declined the offer. He then said they had no soundman, and I figured I could be good at that since I had audio experience in radio and TV. By the time of the Trips Festival, I was their soundman."

At the Sound City Acid Test, Owsley and Lesh spent a good deal of time together raving at one another. "Other than Jerry," Lesh would later write, "I'd not known anyone with as great a breadth of interests before, and it seemed to me that he was actually articulating some of the fuzzy visions we'd had regarding the Meaning of It All." For Lesh, hanging out with Owsley was "like being in a science fiction novel."

Right from the start of what became their enduring friendship, Owsley felt much the same way about Lesh. "Phil was the one I met first, and whenever we would get high together, we would hook up telepathically. It's funny because, in many ways, we were absolutely opposite. He's a Pisces born in the year of the dragon, and I'm a Capricorn born in the year of the dog, but I had grown up with my father, who was also born in the year of the dragon, and so I could always tell when I was pushing too hard with Phil in the wrong direction and when to back off."

Although Owsley did not know anyone who had any experience managing a rock band, he had, by then, already met Rock Scully at a show featuring The Lovin' Spoonful that Scully had helped put on at Longshoreman's Hall as part of the Family Dog collective on October 24, 1965. In Scully's words, "That was when he first hit on me. He said, 'I've been watching you, Scully, and you're doing a good job. Are you making any money on this show?' I said, 'I think we'll do good, but it all depends.' He really wanted to talk business, but I was in the middle of a show and trying to keep it all together. Then he said, 'You've got to hear this band.' They were still The Warlocks then, and although I had already heard about them from Kesey, I forgot about all of this pretty quickly because I had a show to do."

Then 24 years old, Scully had grown up in Carmel, Calif. His stepfather, Milton Mayer, was a well-known Quaker activist who had once hosted his own network radio show. After graduating from Earlham College in Indiana, Scully had attended San Francisco State, where he became involved in a series of massive civil rights demonstrations. During the summer of 1965, Scully had begun managing The Charlatans, a psychedelic band, who were doing an extended residency at the Red Dog Saloon in Virginia City, Nev.

Scully finally saw the Grateful Dead perform for the first time at the Fillmore Acid Test on January 8, 1966. Although he told Owsley that the Dead were "extraordinarily ugly and would probably never make it commercially," Scully also confessed that he had "never heard a more amazing band musically."

Owsley knew that "the Dead needed a manager and Rock had been involved in the Family Dog stuff. None of my other friends knew anything about managing or had any experience doing this. So it was a matter of nobody knowing how to do anything and the musicians being exploited by most managers while having no say in what they did. I shared that with Jerry Garcia and the Dead, and they all thought it was a good idea for me to talk to Rock about this. So I suggested it to him."

Having set his sights on Rock Scully as the person who was best suited to manage the Grateful Dead, Owsley pursued him in what had by now become his usual manner by getting Scully higher than

Continued on page 76

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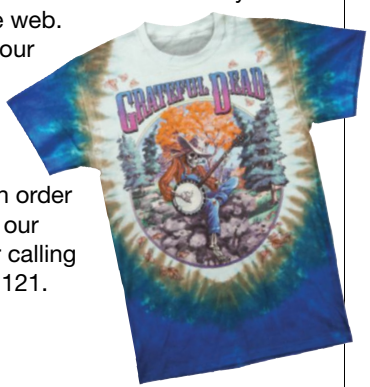

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INTO THE MYSTIC

Jim James takes on an utterly tumultuous year with his second groove-ridden and soul-inflected solo effort, *Eternally Even*.

BY SAMI PROMISLOFF

"MAGIC HOUR" IS QUICKLY APPROACHING IN LOS ANGELES. It's one of the best assets of the SoCal fall. The sun spreads its warmth all over the sky and, then, at just the right time before it sets for the evening, for a precious few minutes, the myriad textures of the city's expanse, from downtown skyscrapers to the inland canyons, become enveloped by a well-saturated rainbow band. For some reason, the effect is always a bit more vivid this time of year. Both scientifically (a little local phenomenon called smog) and mystically, it's probably due to something in the air.

The sky is moving into its nightly, hazy shift over the main drag of Los Angeles' Eagle Rock neighborhood—the pocket of LA that Jim James now calls home in addition to his (and his band My Morning Jacket's) birthplace of Louisville, Ky. He's lively and content to enjoy a few minutes of another picture-perfect afternoon in this city rife with "so many worlds."

"I feel like LA is one of our greatest illustrations of the United States, or the world at large," James says. "Right when I came out here, I got zapped by a new wave of energy and activity in this melting pot with everybody from every walk of life, every nationality, every religion, every sexual preference—*everybody's* here. People come here with a dream—to make things happen, to try."

He's wearing a pair of sunglasses—clearly a year-round requisite for citizens of the Golden State—but, strangely, he has an additional pair nestled in the nook of his button-down shirt.

Though it's been over a decade since he started trimming the long mane of hair that concealed his face during My Morning Jacket's early days, James is undoubtedly a mystic that walks among us—a masterful alchemist of energy, time, space and sentiment—from the stage to the studio. The tangible output of his explorations is channeled into a catalog of songs, which continues to grow and diversify as My Morning Jacket continuously evolves. His efforts also include collaborative projects like Monsters of Folk and The New Basement Tapes, and, most recently, serving behind the boards as producer for Ray LaMontagne and Jonny Fritz.

* * *

THE LATEST CHAPTER IN James' flourishing canon is a provocative, groove-ridden and soul-inflected solo effort, *Eternally Even*, the follow-up to 2013's *Regions of Light and Sound of God*. The history books will characterize 2016 as a surreal blur between fantasy and reality, accompanied by a bewildering acceleration of divisiveness—eerily similar to shifts in the past, yet somehow more overwhelming and inescapable than ever at the same time. *Eternally Even* is James' cohesive, yet contained, statement of hope and determination in the face of a world gone mad, which would never have come to light if not for the perfect recipe of circumstance. From its personnel to its physical recording location and the political infighting that's colored the past year, the record only exists because all the right elements became evident, stepping into the ether to meet their magical meld.

"I tried to score two films with [composer and music supervisor] Brian Reitzell about five or six years ago. We made a lot of beautiful music, but we got fired from both the films for being too weird. We did 30 or 40 minutes of just improv with me playing 'that' organ," James says with profound reverence for the instrument that serves as a common thread throughout the songs on *Eternally Even*, "and [Brian] playing drums. I've always liked it and never known what to do with it."

That is, until a fateful afternoon during My Morning Jacket's last run through Europe while supporting *The Waterfall*. "I remember it being Antwerp or somewhere—it popped up on shuffle one day when I was taking a walk and I just got totally into it," James says. "Words started popping out and vocal melodies, so I took those improv pieces and chopped them up—it was kind of a cool little surprise because I hadn't even planned on doing that. Everything with this record that happened—even the improv piece we played—we didn't sit down that day to do that. We weren't like, 'Let's do a jam that feels *this* way!' We just played. That's the great thing about improv—you don't put any rules or restrictions. It's like all the music you listen to is coming back out through you, hopefully in your own way. It's so weird. It's such a cool thing."

The solo experimentation exemplified by the film score sessions quickly extended to James scavenging for other pieces of the *Eternally Even* puzzle. "I was like, 'If I do this right, I can turn this into an album.' There's a couple other things that are loops or samples [of] things I was already listening to," like the gospel R&B rarity "It'll All Be Over" by The Supreme Jubilees, heard on the *Eternally Even* track "The World's Smiling Now," and "Minor Miracles" by Fruit Bats' Eric D. Johnson, from his 2014 solo release, *EDJ*, where a brief moment of minor lilt serves as the backbone for *Eternally Even*'s second single and call for collective honor, "Here in Spirit."

"I love 'Minor Miracles' so much and I'm excited for more people to hear that song, too—the little riff in the middle triggered my brain, and I would ride around in my car just listening to the loop we created because I was transfixed by that 30 seconds. Then one day"—he pauses and snaps his fingers similar to a magician acing his trick—"all the words and melodies just popped out."

> "Live music, hopefully, is all about good vibrations or trying to get things to a positive place. We're always trying to find a way to engage people, and challenge them, but also give them some comfort, too." JIM JAMES

James' creative process soon became a matter of "snowballing" urgency combined with the fresh perspective of moving to Los Angeles. "I was renting a place that felt really inspiring and lots of stuff started," he says. "It was this really weird place in Montecito Heights. There are two tortoises that live there, like way out in the middle of nowhere down this old dirt road. It felt like you were living on Mars, kind of in a spaceship—it's all abandoned and kind of scary—and things just *happened*."

It's this working awareness of cosmic embrace that greatly aids James in distinguishing what material gets solo treatment and what becomes a full-band excursion. "Songs usually just tell me metaphysically—I don't even know why really—that they're something I want to work on by myself," he says. Audiences view James as a frontman whose visible diversity onstage is limited to vocal range and difference in guitars, but in the studio, and on this record specifically, he plays every instrument. "It'll be something I write on a keyboard or on a bass or on a drum, something that I'm just going to explore on my own—and then with the Jacket, it's so cool that we all play the roles that we play. I feel like a song will say it wants to be played in the Jacket world [because we'll be] *together*."

The same approach also applies to how songs rotate in and out of his setlists, individually honoring and considering "the things going on in your life, the things going on in the world, the energy of the time, the energy of the place—always letting it speak." The ultimate mandate, however, is creating the proper

mix to satisfy the anchoring question: "How do you best get to be a part of the vibrations of that world?" James continues, "Live music, hopefully, is all about good vibrations or trying to get things to a positive place. We're always trying to find a way to engage people, and challenge them, but also give them some comfort, too."

* * *

THE SONGS ON *ETERNALLY Even* are characterized by a frustrated hopefulness and patient determination, "because I feel like we can figure it out," James reveals. "We should want to take care of everybody."

Its nine songs are stylistically interconnected by an underlying pulse that resembles a drive or a heartbeat, awakening the listener to life and rhythmically imploring them to march and seek justice. When combined with rallying cry lyrics that meditate on the impasses and misgivings that have surfaced "at the edge of the world," you've got another capsule of work that expertly lays out James' ongoing ability to be both timely and timeless.

Even within My Morning Jacket, his songwriting purview is consistently fluid and universal, lacking specific emphasis on pronouns, names or dates "so that, hopefully, [the music] can be applicable to anybody"—a welcome approach in our collective, continuous search for equality and limited celebration of progress thus far.

"I feel that a lot of it is inspired by all the terrible stuff that's going on, and just wanting to be a counter to that, wanting to be, hopefully, emitting positivity, and just trying to be part of the discussion," James says. "I definitely don't proclaim to have any of the answers. I feel just as fucked up as everybody—but I want to encourage people to talk, to vote, to speak out."

He speaks passionately about Donald Trump's threat to where we are on the precipice of progress and

Jim James leading My Morning Jacket through their epic, cover-heavy set at Lockn', 8/27/16

Stuart Levine

the grace exhibited by First Lady Michelle Obama in her counter to "racism, intolerance, greed and fear. It's all just old fear." He respectfully admires her "brilliant and amazing" harnessing of rhetoric. "She kept referring to him as 'Hillary's opponent,' like, 'I'm not even going to say his name.' That was such a great move, to not give him any energy. That's the way he should have been treated this whole time—like a bully third grader [relegated to] the corner—we're not going to give you any energy at all until you straighten up."

Instead, James earnestly hopes to chip away at the conversation and transform the story from a "broadcast for hate and violence and terror" to "[broadcasting] as much peace and love as we can—to give more power to the things you want to change, and talk about it in a way that can help heal the wound psychically."

The record's title track, which closes the album, touches on healing society's collective wounds and the celebration of being liberated from an almost romantic form of pain. It feels like a continuation of the sexy lament James channels on the 2015 *Waterfall* cut "Only Memories Remain," a rambling and patiently realized blessing in recognition of "washing those hard feelings away": "Sun's out/ not a thought about the rain/ no trace of tears or pain/ I hope you're having a wonderful life."

My Morning Jacket's other nuanced emotional phases have traces that extend into *Eternally Even*, too—like the feeling of bittersweet peace ("Hide In Plain Sight") or the evaluation of a fling versus believing in permanence ("The World's Smiling Now"). Throughout the record, he considers "[things] that should be done without question, with nothing owed—feeling that way about each other and taking care of each other," James says. From friends that split a check at dinner without incident, to "picking up people with mental health problems on the street and taking them somewhere, taking care of them—getting them psychological and physical help. I wish humanity could have that spirit with each other."

The album also waxes on the idea of commanding the present, while simultaneously raising anxiety-ridden questions that diminish that sense of presence. Imagine any of these questions being posited to a crystal ball: "Is there any peace to be found in a lifetime? Is this love, or are we just having fun? Will future generations ever understand? What if the world became sweet again, do you think we could handle it?"

James asks these questions throughout the body of *Eternally Even*, but he already has some of the answers, too. In fact, he's a true believer that there's a mystic inside all of us, so long as "you get a gut feeling [pursuant to] these attractions we have. You feel like you should apply for this job or like you're going to fall in love with this person—you have to be inspired. If you don't act on that feeling, if you don't do the work, then nothing comes of the inspiration."

It's everywhere, ready to be summoned from perception and plain sight. "There's not really any intention behind it. You're exploring, but it's all about trying to live *now*. The world is smiling on us *now*," he affirms. "[I] start to question, 'How can I have fun? How can I be good to my friends and family? How can I be healthy? How can I be a productive member of society?' It's been fun to shake things up and give new energy. It's fun to go back home and feel that old, time-tested energy and know that I have that to count on. I think it's all meant to be."

WHITE DENIM'S THIRD WIND

After losing two longtime members to Leon Bridges, Austin's great garage-rock hope returns with a fresh lineup and new set of soulful guitar jams. BY MIKE GREENHAUS

WHITE DENIM were just a few minutes into their sweaty Lockn' set when their true interlocking moment took place. It was a hot, late-August afternoon in Arrington, Va., and, despite their status as event newcomers and something of scene outliers, the Austin, Texas garage act already had a pretty good read on their festival crowd. So, with temperatures pushing toward 100, they brought out Joe Russo's Almost Dead/WOLF! guitarist Scott Metzger for a run through the new boogie "Ha Ha Ha Ha (Yeah)" and their debut take on the Roxy Music *Casablanca* meditation "2HB." Though it was the first time that Metzger, a mainstay of the jam community that helped seed Lockn'—thanks to his time with the turn-of-the-millennium Wetlands house band RANA—sat in with White Denim, the collaboration clicked. It also helped a band whose guitar heroics and prog-rock vamps have long been championed by the indie-rock community reach across the aisle to the Grateful Dead family that Lockn' has catered to since its inception.

"We are having a good time with the music right now—we improvise inside of the arrangements we create for the stage," guitarist James Petralli says a few weeks after that breakout set, which many considered to be a weekend highlight. "Solos are different in some tunes, and we are always messing with feels, but we are not ones to hang around in a vamp for too long."

While White Denim have specialized in subtle changes and lightning quick turns for a decade, their past year has been a time of personal reevaluation and sonic rediscovery. In March, the quartet released the Ethan Johns-produced LP *Stiff* on Downtown, their seventh album and first since guitarist Austin Jenkins and founding drummer Josh Block split with the band, following their work on R&B crooner Leon Bridges' smash debut, *Coming Home*. *Stiff* also marks the first time that White Denim has enlisted a single outside producer for an entire recording process, which resulted in one of the group's most retro-sounding releases and also perhaps their most fun and soulful. Both a rebirth and a bridge, *Stiff* features new guitarist Jonathan Horne and drummer Jeff Olson, veterans of Petralli's Bop English solo project. However, as Petralli and longtime bassist Steve Terebecki have continued to fine-tune their sound throughout 2016, they've since reconfigured their band to instead include keyboardist/trumpeter Mike St. Clair and drummer Jordan Richardson, a veteran of Ben Harper and Relentless7.

"The changes from night to night are probably fairly subtle to an audience," Petralli admits. "We like to push ourselves physically and present an intense and tight show. We connect the tunes and kick the tempos up a few clicks for the stage."

White Denim first crossed paths with Johns—whose credits include fellow modern roots acts like Ryan Adams, Kings of Leon and Ray LaMontagne, as well as legends like Paul McCartney, Tom Jones and Crosby, Stills and Nash—at a festival a few years ago and they immediately bonded. In the past, the group has favored self-production or working with multiple voices on their studio projects, but this time the band decided to hand over the reins and create a looser, more live-sounding record.

"We wanted to have a producer to take off some of the heat," Petralli says. "In the past, it got a little confusing for us with the give and take of everybody producing together, so having a centralized guy in that leadership role was something we were interested in."

The group stuck to their usual, organic formula, with Petralli crafting most of *Stiff*'s verses, chords and lyrical changes and the rest of the band writing their parts and coming up with the arrangements as a unit. "If it sounds like the best Justin Bieber song ever, it's definitely going to make the record," Petralli says with a sly grin.

Terebecki, who is usually the second person to take a crack at the songs, thinks the record's loose feel is a result of Johns' decision to record *Stiff* live to 16-track. "We didn't have a lot of opportunity to add a lot of overdubs," he says. "So we played live as a four-piece and that's how the record is, outside of a couple overdubs here and there."

* * *

IT'S A RAINY APRIL AFTERNOON and Petralli and Terebecki are sitting at a high-top in a Lower East Side New York City bar next door to the indie-rock incubator Bowery Ballroom. They are both dressed in the same clothes they'll sport onstage a few hours later. Petralli, whose father and grandfather both played professional baseball, is wearing a backward cap and a jean jacket with a pack of cigarettes tucked into his front pocket. Terebecki is in a fitted white shirt with some tie-dye flourishes.

White Denim is in the midst of a packed two-night run at the club, which has hosted several of the band's career-defining shows in recent years. In 2013, they even played a double-header that stretched late into the night and, as much as anything, showcased their ability to harness the DIY energy of the city's rowdy live-music freaks. While picking at a plate of nachos, White Denim's principal members are discussing their take on Steely Dan's "Peg," which is the first cover they've added to their repertoire. Terebecki says they adopted the song at the request of a *Jimmy Kimmel Live!* staffer who agreed to book the group if they learned the Steely Dan classic. Since then, they've also dropped in a Prince tribute medley. (Improv-rock troubadour, and the evening's opening act, Sam Cohen sat in regularly on both selections throughout the tour and also introduced them to Metzger, who joined them for their Roxy Music nod.)

White Denim has been the musicians' primary musical outlet since 2005, when Terebecki's band Peach Train shared a bill with fellow Austin act Parque Touch, which featured Block, Petralli and guitarist Lucas Anderson. Terebecki was invited to join Parque Touch and, after trying out a few different names, the group started gigging around their hometown as White Denim in 2006. (Anderson left the band to move to Russia.) They quickly settled on their signature blend of prog-rock technicality and loose, garage-rock swagger. From the start, Petralli served as the band's

Scott Metzger finds the middle ground between Roxy Music and Joe Russo's Almost Dead with White Denim at Lockn', 8/26/16.

Dean Budnick

frontman, honing his bluesy voice to give the group's songs weight, but with a delivery that still kept things fun enough to hint at his Frank Zappa obsession. The rhythm section of Terebecki and Block was equally dexterous, allowing the trio to move as a unit and spike their songbook with elements of jazz, psychedelia and '70s stoner rock. A few choice spots at SXSW, CMJ and, especially, Austin City Limits Music Festival, as well as their initial full-length release, *Workout Holiday*, introduced their punky yet experimental sound.

Petralli and Terebecki both note their ties to the improvisational world. Terebecki's dad was a Dead fan who also listened to a lot of "prog and periphery jambands like Ozric Tentacles around the house," he says.

His bandmate's roots run even deeper. "I've always been a really big fan of Jerry Garcia as a guitar player, so I cop a lot of his moves," Petralli says with a smile. "I had a good friend who could drive before me, and his older brother was really into [Widespread Panic's] *Space Wrangler*, The Black Crowes, Traffic and classic rock. That's all we would listen to. I saw Panic a couple times and smoked opium out of a deer antler at one of their shows—I was 17, so it was pretty informative, and I just got into smoking grass and listening to extended guitar solos. My senior year of high school, I saw Phish a bunch of times around *Farmhouse*."

As his tastes changed, Petralli started digging into the Thrill Jockey catalog, falling under the spell of experimental post-rock acts like Tortoise and exploring good old-fashioned rock-and-roll. "I stepped away from the scene a little bit, but I always loved the studio records of the Grateful Dead," Petralli says, pegging himself as a child of the modern jamband era. "The more time I spend in the studio, the more I love those records and appreciate what they accomplished from a production and writing standpoint. Those are still some of the most creative recordings ever made."

White Denim entered their second act in 2010 when they expanded their lineup to include Jenkins, a student of country-rock and a descendent of the Allman Brothers Band's twin-guitar harmonies, and the newly minted foursome expanded their sonic palette. Their 2011 release, *D*, tilted the group's sound toward their prog and psych-rock influences and wove in acoustic elements and other studio layers. Terebecki says their new lineup, which allowed them to push their instrumental sections and melodies to the limit, helped the band "cross over a bit" into the jamband scene.

"Yes was the big touchstone for that record," Petralli says. "And I snuck little partial quotes of 'St. Stephen' and little nuggets in there for Deadheads—we were improvising more with our vamping and stuff like that in a few spots."

They moved further into the live music world with 2013's *Corsicana Lemonade*, their first album with Jenkins fully integrated into the band. Teaming up with Jeff Tweedy—who opened up Wilco's fabled Loft studio to the group—on some tracks and Spoon/White Rabbits producer Jim Vollentine on others, White Denim laid out a kaleidoscopic mix of Southern rock, blues, roots-rock and elastic garage-burners primed for festival slots, which the band started landing at Bonnaroo, Mountain Jam and Solid Sound.

"With *D*, I stacked up all these guitars and, after Austin joined, we added even more guitars," Petralli says with a laugh as he thinks back on their "power-chord period." "There are tracks on that record that have 10 guitars."

* * *

DESPITE THEIR GRADUAL RISE through the marquee club circuit that has become the live music world's bedrock in recent years, White Denim's career took a sudden left turn when Jenkins met Leon Bridges at a Fort Worth, Texas bar during the summer of 2014. Bridges was completely unknown at the time—working at a restaurant and testing out his brand of vintage soul during a weekly open mic night—when Jenkins' girlfriend approached him. Her opening line was that Bridges had the same vintage Wrangler jeans as Jenkins.

"When I met Austin at that bar that night, I didn't know who the hell he was," Bridges says with a laugh. "It wasn't until after he left that the bartender was like, 'You know that was Austin Jenkins of White Denim.' The funny thing is I had first heard of White Denim a week before I met Austin. I didn't know any of the guys yet, but they had just played a show at Shipping & Receiving and everyone was going crazy about them."

Bridges considers that night the start of his "rags to riches story." Soon after, Jenkins brought Bridges into the studio to record a few tracks with some of his musical associates, including Block. White Denim's managers signed Bridges and, thanks to an authentic, retro-sounding voice which eerily recalls Sam Cooke, he blossomed into a grassroots sensation. Less than a year after his album hit in mid-2015, Bridges had already been invited to the White House, nominated for a Grammy and sold out prestigious theaters across the country.

Block and Jenkins played their last show with White Denim in October of 2014. The band had initially scheduled some time off while Terebecki prepared for the birth of his daughter and Block and

Terebecki holding down the new White Denim at this year's Lockn', 8/26/16.

Dean Budnick

Jenkins recorded with Bridges.

"It happened really quickly for them," Petralli says of Bridges' rapid rise. "We said, 'We're going to take some time off, but let's get together and write in a month or whatever,' and they went on tour with Leon. Communication wasn't super great and there was so much happening with us personally that it was kind of like, 'Huh, I wonder what's going on?'"

But the writing was on the wall. Around February 2015, with Bridges' star rising in advance of his Columbia debut, Jenkins and Block left to focus on Bridges and other production work. (They also recently recorded Nicole Atkins.)

"They were going to be touring forever," Terebecki says. "We were like, 'We really need to get in there and make another record—we can't wait for you guys to tour.' It was around March where we started to figure something else out."

Petralli and Terebecki regrouped to work on *Stiff* in mid-2015. Around the same time, Petralli was gearing up to release his first solo album under the moniker Bop English (the pseudonym he used in White Denim's early days). The side project started as an outlet for Petralli to unveil a handful of songs he'd been working on for a few years that had yet to see the light of day. The resulting collection, *Constant Bop*, still falls very much in White Denim's sonic, genre-defying orbit; Block plays drums on the album while Terebecki provides some samples. "With White Denim, it's important for us to work on the music together," the guitarist says of his extracurricular activities. "It was just a studio project I was doing in my spare time. I had no intention of putting a band together—the band forming was actually a reaction to feeling like we were going to have some time between getting a new White Denim together. I just really wanted to produce a record on my own, so it was more about that than anything."

Petralli says *Constant Bop* had been finished and ready to ship as soon as White Denim had a little breathing room, but with the lineup changes, he decided to use the project to test out a new version of White Denim and hit the road. He assembled a live version of Bop English featuring Terebecki on keys, along with Horne and Olson. "With the guys quitting, I just needed to get White Denim together," he admits. "That's our bread and butter, so we just ditched it. I thought, 'I can't really justify doing this when there's an opportunity to continue White Denim.'" The Bop English tour went well and they rolled that energy into a new White Denim lineup.

White Denim live-tracked decent portions of their past few albums, but, with *Stiff*, they decided to forego the 'studio as an instrument' approach almost entirely. With Johns at the helm, they settled on a mix of sexy Curtis Mayfield-influenced chestnuts like "Ha Ha Ha Ha (Yeah)" and "Take It Easy (Ever After Lasting Love)," '70s rockers such as "Real Deal Momma," "Had 2 Know (Personal)" and "Holda You (I'm Psycho)," and the power-pop of "There's a Brain in My Head." They focused less on big chords and more on grooves, resulting in slow jams like the funky "(I'm the One) Big Big Fun" and the modern, psychedelic soul closer "Thank You." A number of influences seeped in, including Texas guitar player Nitzinger, English hard rockers Necromandus, Tame Impala, Dungen, over-the-top R&B and R. Kelly. Both of their new members were already well-versed in the band's catalog by the time they entered rehearsals. They met Olson, a jazz-trained drummer, at a White Denim show when he was 19. But despite the lineup changes, *Stiff* still feels very much like White Denim.

> "We are having a good time with the music right now—we improvise inside of the arrangements we create for the stage."
> **JAMES PETRALLI**

"To be completely honest, I was really nervous about how people would perceive the new band, just because we started the group together a long time ago and we had a lot of chemistry," Petralli says. "I'd been playing with Josh since I started playing guitar at 17 years old, so I was really concerned how it would play out without them. But every day that goes by, this band gets better and I feel much better about it."

The new White Denim lineup started revisiting their back-catalog, playing early tunes first and working up to more recent tunes. Their spring and summer tours featured a healthy mix of material from each of the outfit's eras, and Petralli says their drummer was particularly drawn to songs with odd meters that "weren't under a time signature."

They cherry-picked tracks that worked for the evolving group and refashioned some tunes with fresh jungle beats. They also added St. Clair, whom they plucked from a local steel player. "We've always wanted to have a keyboardist in the band because we have so many keyboards on the record, and we can finally play some of those old tunes like 'Sex Prayer' and 'Sitting,'" Terebecki says. Throughout the spring, Petralli admits the group was still "feeling each other out a little bit, so it's definitely going back to the old way of doing it—we're still doing medleys and stitching a lot of tunes together, but with a more rocky energy, a more hard-hitting kind of thing."

Richardson joined White Denim this summer and has already helped push the sound to new heights. "Jordan played on a session that Steve and I were on and we hit it off quickly," Petralli explains. "We have similar tastes in music and seem to share artistic goals. He is also really funny and easy to be around. We are really happy to have him."

White Denim remain committed to expanding their sound as they continue to gel onstage. Petralli will also continue to revisit his roots when he participates in The Complete Last Waltz, a Thanksgiving Eve tribute to The Band, featuring Cohen, Wilco's Nels Cline and the members of Joe Russo's Almost Dead, among others, at Port Chester, N.Y.'s Capitol Theatre. He sees that scene's loose feel creeping back into their sound.

"We are jamming tons in the studio and in soundchecks," he says. "Having new musicians in the mix has been really good for the music. I'm personally feeling more open and inspired than I have in years."

Outside a small circle of friends: Taylor Goldsmith, Lee Pardini, Wylie Gelber, Griffin Goldsmith (l-r)

THE UNEXPECTED AND THE INEVITABLE

Dawes plugs in for an electric, eclectic, end-of-the-world party.

BY LARSON SUTTON

GRIFFITH Observatory is perched on a geological ledge 1,135 feet above Los Angeles. On smogless days like today, the location offers limitless views stretching in all directions, from the purple mountains beyond the San Fernando Valley to the horizon of the Pacific. If we are all going to die, as Taylor Goldsmith tells us on Dawes' fifth and latest album, then this is as good a place as any to be. At least up here, maybe we can see it coming.

"Have you been here before?" the Los Angeles native asks enthusiastically. "There is a great spot out front."

It's a few minutes before

noon on the last Friday of the summer. Charter buses are emptying gobs of chattering visitors who are not sure where to look first. An Asian tourist in a size-too-small sombrero smiles for a photo, the iconic Hollywood sign over his shoulder.

Taylor finds a small table on the Observatory's southern terrace and sits with his back to the snarled, sprawling matrix of the LA basin in the distance. The black-domed planetarium and its bleached-white edifice stand sentry to his right. It's peaceful and oddly quiet this high up, and the stillness is surreal in contrast to the nearly four million souls rushing around the City of Angels below.

Energetic, if a bit bedraggled, Taylor is days removed from the road, just off a Dawes amphitheater run supporting Alabama Shakes. His almost-shaggy beard befits his folksman rep—or could perhaps belong to an NHL skater in a playoff push. It's worth asking why mortality is now on the mind of the quartet he leads with brother Griffin on drums, bassist Wylie Gelber and keyboardist Lee Pardini.

"There's a duality to it. I told some friends the title of this record is *We're All Gonna Die*, and they said, 'That's amazing. That's hilarious. You've got to do it,'" says Taylor, 31, the group's primary songwriter, singer and guitarist. "On the other hand, I don't want it to ever come off as some guy in his early 30s who thinks this is a joke. It's as terrifying to me as it is to anyone, maybe even a little more."

* * *

DAWES ROSE OUT OF THE ASHES of Simon Dawes, a Malibu rock band that included guitarist and producer Blake Mills. Though homegrown in Southern California, Dawes stylistically took a left turn off the Pacific Coast Highway into the Laurel Canyon sound of the 1970s popularized by Neil Young and Joni Mitchell, quickly garnering the folk tag after the group's first two albums and a subsequent

high-profile pairing with Jackson Browne at a 2011 Occupy Wall Street event. They found their first success on the road, headlining clubs and theaters, turning festival stages like Newport Folk into second homes.

But soon after, Taylor found himself trying to break away.

"When we were making our early records, the idea of hearing my acoustic guitar back into my headphones felt like it could've lasted me forever. I was so in love with the most bare-bones approach to documenting songs," he recalls. "It was never an intentional thing to chase down new stuff and make a 2016 record because I wouldn't know how. For us, it was: 'Let's create something that confounds us.'"

We're All Gonna Die is likely to be confounding to many, starting with the timing of its release. Since 2009, Dawes had established a reliable schedule of recording and touring, delivering four albums in six years. They made 2015's *All Your Favorite Bands* in Nashville with esteemed Americana musician and producer Dave Rawlings, and welcomed some of Music Row's most notable session players as guests. It bowed at No. 1 on the folk charts.

> "When we were making our early records, the idea of hearing my acoustic guitar back into my headphones felt like it could've lasted me forever. I was so in love with the most bare-bones approach to documenting songs."
>
> TAYLOR GOLDSMITH

For the group, it marked a goal met, and a new expectation to shatter. "With *All Your Favorite Bands*, we had one clear objective: 'Let's put down what we know we can do—what we do on a nightly basis on our instruments and as singers,'" explains Taylor. "In a way, that opened up a whole new world for us. 'What do we want to do now?'"

Only eight months into touring in support of the record, Dawes were back in the studio. There were enough strong song ideas rising to the surface that Dawes put their expected road schedule promoting *All Your Favorite Bands* aside without pause. "There's a concern with making sure you milk an album for all it's worth, in terms of touring," Taylor says. "Really, I'd love to be putting out music every day."

Enter Mills: Taylor's old bandmate, best friend and one of the hottest producers of the moment with credits like John Legend, Alabama Shakes, Laura Marling and Jim James under his belt. Having recently been nominated for a Producer of the Year Grammy for his work on Alabama Shakes' *Sound & Color*—the record would win Best Alternative Music Album—Mills was primed to take the Dawes everyone knew and flip it on its head. Dawes was ready, too, tapping into what Taylor refers to as Mills' unquenchable ambition to make great albums.

"If we would've gone with another producer, one we'd worked with before, we could've made this batch of songs sound like an extension of *Nothing Is Wrong* or *All Your Favorite Bands*," explains Taylor. "It wasn't the material that forced us to make a different-sounding record. It was the fact that we wanted to."

In March, Mills and the group set up at EastWest Studios on Hollywood's Sunset Boulevard. From the outset, it was apparent he was the perfect partner to walk them to the precipice. Anything and everything would need an explanation in a process that Taylor describes as both incredibly thorough and illuminating.

"It's challenging," says Taylor. "Every lyric, he's like, 'Why are we doing this?' Even something simple, like when I would repeat a line three times, he'd ask, 'Why is it said three times? I need to understand why.' All of a sudden there is this conversation that unearths new information, not only for him, but for me."

However rewarding the sessions may have been for the band, the finished product may well be a jolt to the ears of longtime fans, a likelihood that Taylor anticipates and embraces. "If people say, 'Dawes was this and I liked them, and now they're not and I hate them,' to me, that is exciting. I think that's promising. What would be terrible is if people say Dawes delivered a really dependable Dawes record. Then, no one

Dean Budnick

would care. It's just going to go away."

* * *

A FEW DAYS LATER, WITH NO signs of an imminent apocalypse, Griffin Goldsmith calls from his car. "We knew the substance of the album was going to be controversial for people that have liked our band in the past," he says. "What I most enjoy about the title is that it forces you to face it, and it's inevitably going to evoke hateful responses as well as favorable ones. It's [coming] face to face with the fact that we each have a subjective experience."

The record's most obvious and immediate differences are derived from its sometimes deceptive sonic presentation. The instruments are percussive and spacious, doubling to accentuate punchy rhythms, or splitting off into subtle counterpoints. Songs unfold to their resolutions on repeating bass riffs or are carried by a cavalcade of female voices in harmony.

There is a conspicuous precision to it all, in particular in Griffin's drumming. And a share of eccentricity, like Mills using a Pelican case as a stand-in for a kick drum or insisting that Griffin repeatedly strike a small marked spot to achieve the acoustic and emotional optimum.

"The effort was to take every note played on the drums during a song and do less," Griffin says. "In turn, I would view each note with more soul, if you will. Make it more meaningful by doing less."

Even, Griffin elaborates, by allowing him to emulate the tonal and regimented qualities of 808 and MPC drum programming machines on his kit—hallmarks of the hip-hop music he notes as an influence. Both Goldsmith brothers have enjoyed reading early reviews that have, incorrectly, cited the record's unconventional instrumentation.

The drummer mentions one article, which reports, "'The song opens up bare with fuzz guitar and a drum machine,' neither of which is on that song, which I think is cool. I like listening to records where I can't quite decipher what's going on."

"I wanted to figure out weird sounds. I wanted to figure out weird parts," his brother adds. "I wanted to support something that instead has the spotlight on Wylie or on Lee or on Griff."

In the past, the guitarist has recorded keyboard parts but, this time, he turned them over entirely to Pardini, the newest member of Dawes. Pardini joined the ensemble last year, initially as a tour replacement for Tay Strathairn, and immediately made distinctive contributions to the outfit.

"Let me just get out of the way," Taylor says of deferring to Pardini. "He's so prolific and in a lot of ways, was like the MVP."

A steady stream of guests flow through the record too, including venerable drummer Jim Keltner, Will Oldham and Jim James; Keltner's contribution, a beautifully atonal MPC percussion track on "When the Tequila Runs Out," moved Griffin to call him a genius. As for the female voices, there is Alabama Shakes frontwoman Brittany Howard, Lucius' Holly Laessig and Jess Wolfe, and one other person, who's perhaps the single biggest reason Taylor is feeling so full of heady thoughts.

"If someone is asking, 'Do you love your girlfriend Mandy?' Hell, yeah, and I'm proud of it," declares Taylor.

Mandy is singer and actress Mandy Moore, who reportedly finalized her divorce from musician Ryan Adams in June. She and Taylor have

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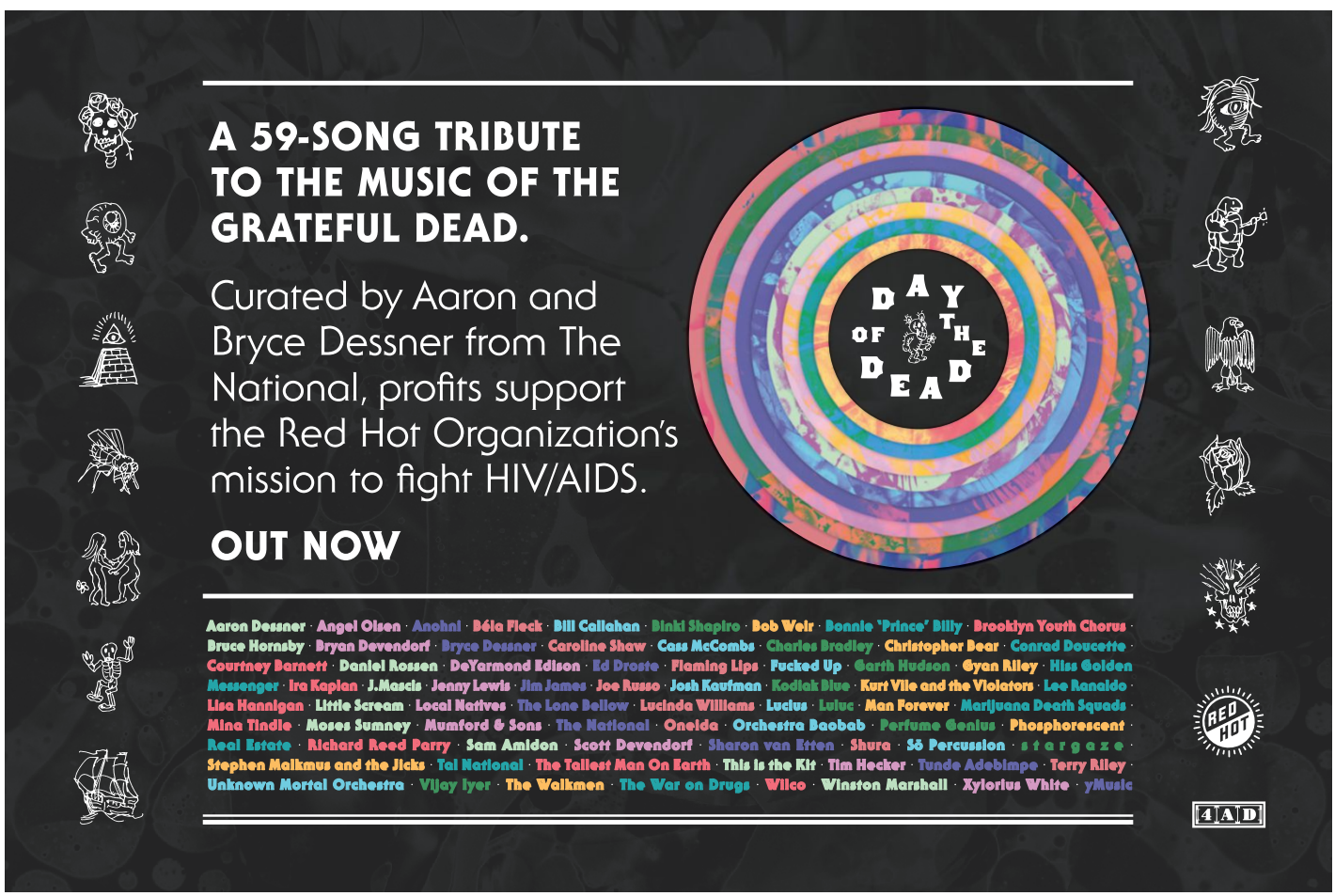


THE GOLD CIRCLE

Through ebbs, flows and three volumes of *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band celebrate a half-century of pioneering Americana.

BY LEE ZIMMERMAN

"DO I FEEL OCCASIONALLY that we are disrespected or overlooked? Sure. But on the other hand, we've had this great career. I don't know what it is. It could be that we're a moving target, musically. We cover a lot of stuff. We get bored just sitting still."

That's Jeff Hanna's response when asked if his group, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, has been denied due credit for helping extend the arc of Americana, a distinction they share with bands like The Band, The Byrds, New Riders of the Purple Sage, The Flying Burrito Brothers, Poco and the Grateful Dead.

On the other hand, if Nitty Gritty Dirt Band had only instigated the unprecedented summit of country's old and new guards with 1972's epic three-record set *Will the Circle Be Unbroken*, then their iconic status would have already been ensured. That album broke new ground by paying tribute to those who had paved the way for the Dirt Band and their aforementioned contemporaries. It was about much more than two generations finding common ground; it was, in a very real sense, a cultural connection that cut through the alienation and distrust between the insurgents of the '60s and musicians who touted tradition. It was a revolutionary concept for bluegrass royalty, like master musicians Jimmy Martin, Roy Acuff, Mother Maybelle Carter, Doc Watson and Earl Scruggs, to share studio time with this bunch of former folkies from Long Beach, California.

"Doc was happy to join us," multi-instrumentalist John McEuen remembers. "He was saying the folk scene was dying, and they were looking for new audiences. I figured if we could get these guys to play with us, we could introduce them to our crowd. Likewise, people were always asking us, 'Where did you learn to play the banjo?' It just came together the way it was meant to come together. It was magic. We started recording around the first of August and, six days later, we had 35 songs."

"We were just hanging on for dear life. We were blown away and having fun all at the same time," Hanna recalls.

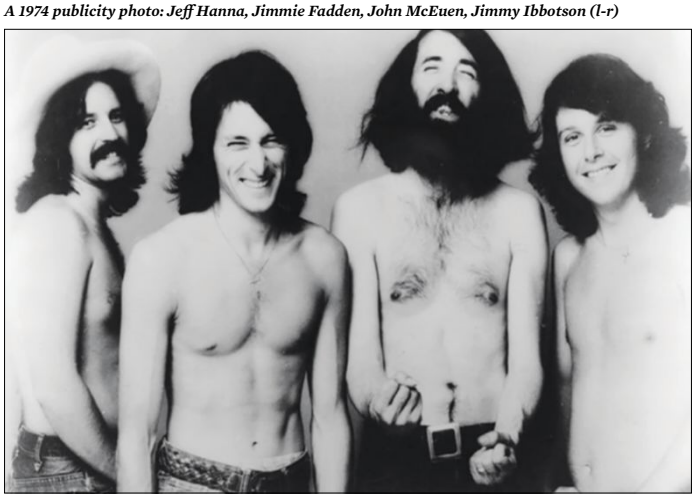
Still, not everyone was convinced it would work. Hanna recalls their initial meeting with Roy Acuff in Nashville. "He wasn't impressed," Hanna relates. "It was the biggest 'we're-hippies-and-they're-not' moment. But, to his credit, he came to the back door of the studio a few days later, and when he saw what was going on, he said, 'This ain't nothing but country. I'll be here tomorrow.'"

The chemistry flowed naturally but, then again, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band wasn't nearly as radical as most of their West Coast brethren. While their musical origins were similar to mind-expanding bands like the Dead, Jefferson Airplane and other outfits that had evolved from traditional trappings, the Dirt Band never strayed all that far from their original influences. The band's first four albums—their eponymous debut and its follow-ups, *Ricochet*, *Rare Junk* and a live effort, aptly titled *Alive*—reflected the sound of an eclectic bunch, one that mixed a love of old-time music with a penchant for both the frivolous and the profound. They also had a sense of the sounds that were echoing out of Laurel Canyon at the same time.

"What set us apart was that we didn't have a steel-guitar player," Hanna reckons. "We leaned a little more on a Cajun influence with a rock-steady beat and added in the bluegrass element as well. That's where we carved our niche."

"We were a jug band in overdrive," McEuen adds.

A 1974 publicity photo: Jeff Hanna, Jimmie Fadden, John McEuen, Jimmy Ibbotson (l-r)



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FORMED IN 1966, NITTY GRITTY Dirt Band originally included multi-instrumentalists Hanna, Jimmie Fadden, Les Thompson, Bruce Kunkel and Ralph Barr. Their lineup remained fluid during those earlier days, with a number of ancillary members and fellow travelers coming and going—one being a 17-year-old Jackson Browne, who remained in their ranks all of six months, and others, like Bernie Leadon, Rodney Dillard, Johnny Sandlin and Chris Darrow, who would drift in and out, eventually achieving fame with other enterprises. This early incarnation of the band managed to score a regional hit with "Buy for Me the Rain," as well as a part in a major motion picture, *Paint Your Wagon*, which found them sharing screen time with the film's two stars, Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin.

McEuen—a whiz on strings whose ability to jump between guitar, banjo, mandolin and, later, fiddle made him one of the group's great assets—arrived shortly thereafter. The band briefly broke up in 1969 but came back with a vengeance, courtesy of *Uncle Charlie & His Dog Teddy*, and, following that, *All the Good Times*—two albums that would more or less establish the template for the *Circle* album and all that would follow. The former not only gave the group—now down to a core of Hanna, Fadden, McEuen, Thompson and newer recruit singer/guitarist Jimmy Ibbotson—their first national hit with the Jerry Jeff Walker composition "Mr. Bojangles," but it also spawned several other chart contenders, including covers of "House at Pooh Corner," and "Some of Shelly's Blues," all of which put them on firm commercial footing.

"The *Uncle Charlie* album

NGDB today: John McEuen, Jimmie Fadden, Jeff Hanna, Bob Carpenter (l-r)

started our career in real-time," McEuen says. "It was a collection of eclectic tunes. It was an entertaining set of music where every song was a surprise. It had the perfect blend of singing and song choices."

The band was barely five years into their trajectory when the group's manager—John McEuen's brother Bill—suggested the idea of retracing American music's roots with a summit of its elder statesmen.

"We went to see The Earl Scruggs Revue playing at this club in Boulder," Hanna recalls. "So when we were driving Earl back to his hotel after the gig, John kind of popped the question: 'Would you, *uh*, *uh*, *uh*, do a record with us?' And Earl said, 'I'd be proud to.' A couple of weeks later, Doc Watson played the same club, and John went back with the caveat that we were doing a record with Earl Scruggs. Earl was our magnet. And from that point on, it kept evolving."

"Not many other groups would risk their entire career by doing an acoustic album after having hits like we had done," McEuen suggests. "If the *Circle* album hadn't succeeded, we would have been dead in the water."

Nevertheless, from that point on, they proceeded steadily, if somewhat surreptitiously. Thompson and Ibbotson departed in the mid-'70s, replaced by a rotating cast of temporary additions before keyboard player Bob Carpenter joined the fold in 1979. Also, starting in 1976, the "Nitty Gritty" portion of their moniker was dropped, and they subsequently referred to themselves as "The Dirt Band" for the next five years.

> "Some of the rock intelligentsia, and even some of our rock-star friends, dismissed us, but the folks in Nashville thought we were cool as shit."
>
> **JEFF HANNA**

"That was a mistake," McEuen insists. "Why would you take 15 years of marketing and making records and then change the name of the group? They said, 'Well, everyone calls us the Dirt Band.' I remember we were getting on a plane and the stewardess asked us if we were in a band. And Jimmie said, 'Yeah, we're the Dirt Band.' And she said, 'Is that anything like the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band?' It was the next day that everyone decided to change it back."

More hits came later, including the single "An American Dream," written by Rodney Crowell and featuring a shared vocal with Linda Ronstadt. However, it was their appearance (as "The Toot Uncommons") backing up pal Steve Martin as he mugged his way through his novelty hit "King Tut" on *Saturday Night Live* that truly thrust them back into the spotlight. Likewise, their groundbreaking goodwill tour of the Soviet Union in May 1977 not only gave them the distinction of being the first American band to tour that region, but also allowed them to once again break barriers.

The '80s also proved to be a productive period for the group, particularly in country-music realms, thanks to such songs as "Dance Little Jean," "Long Hard Road (The Sharecropper's Dream)," "Modern Day Romance" and "Fishin' in the Dark." McEuen left and was temporarily replaced by Bernie Leadon. The new lineup released a sequel to the *Circle* album, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken: Volume Two*, in 1989, reuniting the band with some of the participants from the original recordings, as well as contemporary colleagues such as Emmylou Harris, Johnny Cash, John Prine, John Denver, Roger McGuinn, Chris Hillman, John Hiatt and Bruce Hornsby. It brought the group a pair of Grammys as well as nods from the Country Music Association for Best Country

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CULT SCIENCE

Chris Robinson walked away from fame and fortune to build a brand new Brotherhood, but that's not stopping him from reaching his musical manifest destiny.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

CHRIS ROBINSON is standing behind a recording console, wearing socks without shoes and dancing in place as an engineer plays back one of his newest songs. It's late afternoon and the long-haired 49-year-old singer is deep into the recording of *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel*, his fourth album with the Chris Robinson Brotherhood, and the first he's recorded in the shadow of his adopted community and spiritual sanctuary just outside San Francisco. For most of the month, his Brotherhood—guitarist Neal Casal, keyboardist Adam MacDougall and drummer Tony Leone—have been camped out at a spacious, hillside 1960s home that's been converted into a Big Pink-like studio that members of the CRB affectionately refer to as their "arts laboratory."

Robinson moved to Marin, Calif., in July 2015 with his wife and young daughter, and quickly identified the perfect recording space. Located in the shadow of Stinson Beach, an address now tied to the P.O. box number where Deadheads shipped their carefully decorated envelopes for last year's Fare Thee Well shows, the studio is a true product of its surroundings—built from recycled materials salvaged from the Bay Area. Since opening its doors three years ago, the "laboratory" has welcomed a new generation of woolly indie-rockers with wide ears and kaleidoscopic tastes like My Morning Jacket, Band of Horses, Thee Oh Sees and Real Estate's Alex Bleeker. The members of the CRB have already turned the space into a second home, sectioning off a vocal booth area with tie-dyed tapestries. A few of the band members are even staying onsite throughout the sessions, though Casal has opted to crash with his friend and Hard Working Americans bandmate Dave Schools.

"We've had the opportunity to make records in more conventional studio settings, and we poured all of our energies into that at the time, both what we were saying with our compositions and with our performances," Robinson explains a few months after *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel*'s July release. "But when an opportunity like this came to seclude ourselves away on the side of the mountain and get the cauldron stirring, we took it. It is a cult science in a way—you get a group of people who are all attempting to be in the same vibrational reality together, and you focus and you make things happen and they appear. In our case, those *things* are our songs. You want the compositions to be alive and you want the performances to be dynamic and you want the sounds to be unique."

Jon Cornick

The Brotherhood: Neal Casal, Chris Robinson, Tony Leone, Adam MacDougall, Jeff Hill (l-r)

Since shifting his attention from his classic, bluesy rock-and-roll band The Black Crowes, Robinson has honed in on a cosmic blend of lyrical Americana and psychedelic-rock that has made his quintet a favorite on the jamband and festival circuits. They've toured with Tedeschi Trucks Band and regularly collaborate with Phil Lesh, both on the road and at Terrapin Crossroads. *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel* expands their sonic palette, adding additional elements of funk, soul, country and even groovy synth textures. A true indie effort, *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel* was written and produced by the band and released, like their other records, on Robinson's Silver Arrow label.

"With the entire situation we find ourselves in, we're really only responsible for the creative output—for our vibes and decisions, how we do things," Robinson adds, stroking the long, unkempt, slightly gray beard he's harvested for over a decade. "We're the hunter-gatherers of the music business and, just like the hunter-gatherers of culture or society, we have to live on what our environment gives us. You have to exploit that fully and, by exploiting, I mean survival. So if we find ourselves with the opportunity to make a record like this, then, of course, we almost have to let every single thing go, give ourselves completely to the muse and see what's on the other side when we come out of it."

After playing back the dark, brooding instrumental "Give Us Back Our Eleven Days," which is based off a soundcheck jam, Robinson moves from the studio's lower-level recording console to an upstairs living-room space and sips on some tea. He settles into one of the room's comfy sofas, glancing over at the weed paraphernalia spread out on a table and his impressive and eclectic record collection; a George Clinton LP currently sits at the top of the stacks. Even in CRB's leaner early days, their late-night listening sessions helped the young band foster their musical shorthand on the road.

"A real musician loves all sorts of music—they love rock-and-roll, they love jazz, bluegrass, soul and R&B, anything," he says. "At the end of the day, it's a bond or a connection between people who understand the madness of it all. It's given us great fulfillment, great joy, great adventure. It's also been a way to deal with all the other stuff—the great confusion, the great pain and the great losses. We're very lucky to allow the muse to overtake us in that way."

Casal, who has served as one of Robinson's co-pilots since the Brotherhood formed in 2011, is quick to note the important role the house served in shaping the sessions. CRB entered the studio with only three complete songs and, by the time they wrapped things up three weeks later, they had enough strong material for both *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel* and a companion EP, *If You Lived Here, You Would Be Home By Now*, which was released in November. Oftentimes, Robinson would work on lyrics outside by a tree while his bandmates would bat around ideas on the other side of the wall. Their telepathic connection recalls the night Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter conceived "Terrapin Station," simultaneously in different rooms, during an electrical storm.

"When we all got into the living room of the house and Chris opened his overflowing notebook of ideas—and we all opened our instrument cases—a fair amount of magic went down," says Casal, who has a salt-and-pepper beard of his own that reinforces the group's fraternal spirit. "I don't use that word lightly; 'magic' is a word that's oft abused these days, but we stirred up some synergy there. It shocked me, I have to say."

Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel also marks the Brotherhood's first lineup change. In 2015, Ollabelle's Leone, best known for his work with Levon Helm during his final years, replaced founding drummer George Sluppick. The retooled CRB quickly returned to the road and tested out their chemistry. Then, shortly before they started recording, original bassist Mark Dutton decided that he no longer wanted to tour—though they didn't make an announcement at the time—and he sat out the sessions. Bassist Ted Pecchio, whose credits include work with Col. Bruce Hampton, Susan Tedeschi and Doyle Bramhall II, subbed in the studio before the band settled on a new, permanent member to drive the low end, Jeff Hill.

The record has a different energy for CRB, jumping from the *Beggars Banquet* vibes of "Forever as the Moon" to the George Clinton nod "Narcissus Soaking Wet" and The Band salute "California Hymn." And the album's title reflects a group of brothers who are carrying the hippie-torch of the classic Bay Area acts, yet are still in touch with America's current cultural concerns and their own search for an overall sense of sonic authenticity. Robinson, who still proudly touts that he considered a career as a writer before jumping into music as a teenager, ties the album together with his rich lyrics and timeless voice.

"On a lot of levels, you're telling a sonic story, you're telling a rhythmic story," he says. "You have highs and lows and dramatic things, pretty things and ugly things, but it all has to coalesce to one thing. It's about being open and intuitive enough to show yourself. It's like being able to turn off a light and seeing the phosphorescent glow that something has left behind."

* * *

CRB'S ROOTS STRETCH BACK nearly a decade to when MacDougall joined The Black Crowes in 2007. "Adam and I are really the ones who ran this whole thing up the flagpole," Robinson says of CRB's formation, which started with the desire to write songs while The Black Crowes were on tour. "On days off, I'd sit around trying to teach myself some more guitar and writing. Adam brings his practice keyboard over and now we're practicing and writing together. And then, at least for me, I can formulate some sort of overall vision of what it is supposed to look like and smell like and taste like and be like."

It had been two years since The Black Crowes reunited, following an extended break, during which Robinson, a lifelong Deadhead, moved deeper than ever into the modern jamband world through tours with Phil & Friends and a close association with Warren Haynes. While the Crowes were long-heralded as poster boys for modern hippie culture, and often improvised in the concert, the reunited group felt looser and freer than ever. Their 2008 comeback, *Warpaint,* leaned into their rootsy, psychedelic side with the addition of Luther Dickinson, and its follow-up, the 2009 double-album opus *Before the Frost...Until the Freeze* was even recorded at Levon Helm's Barn.

During their '90s heyday, The Black Crowes had the unique ability to blend the hard, blues-rock spirit of The Rolling Stones and the Faces with more mind-expanding textures, and Robinson's interests continued to drift toward a decidedly retro mix of Americana, soul, R&B and groove-rock. With another Crowes break in plain sight and his brother and band co-founder Rich more interested in sticking with their classic sound, Robinson started a new musical family of his own.

"I knew The Black Crowes weren't going on for those years after 2010, or it wasn't going to go on much longer than that," Robinson admits of their eventual 2011-2012 hiatus. "For me, it wasn't just about: 'I have nothing else to do.' This was about my essence. I'm a songwriter first and foremost and all this other stuff is just because somebody

Chris Robinson, sporting a touch of Jerry, at this year's Lockn', 8/28/16.

Stuart Levine

has to do it, in a weird way."

MacDougall first bonded with Robinson at one of Jonathan Wilson's fabled Los Angeles jam sessions, which led to an invitation to join the Crowes. A product of New York's Roosevelt Island, MacDougall says that his friends were part of the reason that there were rumors that "a whole society of people were living under the island" in the 1980s. He is a calming presence and wealth of knowledge on a range of subjects—from his native city's complex subway system to the jazz records his parents exposed him to at an early age. "With The Black Crowes, it was cool, but there was definitely a vibe between the back lounge of the bus and the front lounge—the little barriers between people that had been with each other 20-something years," he says of his time in the band. "There's just a lot of baggage that comes with that. [With CRB], it's nice to see people wandering around the tour bus and being able to be anywhere. It's not like you're in the wrong section."

Wilson was initially supposed to be a member of CRB, but left before the project took flight, and Robinson recruited Casal as his guitar foil. They'd run in each other's circles for years, and even spent time on the road together when Casal's former band Beachwood Sparks opened for the Crowes. In addition to his own journeyman solo work, Casal is an accomplished photographer and was a key member of Ryan Adams' most collaborative ensemble, The Cardinals. CRB marks the start of a busy second act that includes parallel projects like the jamband supergroup Hard Working Americans and the instrumental ensemble Circles Around the Sun, which grew out of the set-break music he wrote for last year's Fare Thee Well concerts.

"Neal's done it all: He's written great songs, he's made great records, he's toured by himself, he's been in a band," Robinson says. "That shows me someone who sees their life as their work. The songs we write, the gigs we do, the songs we sing—that's all part of the life and very little of that has to do with fame or money or stuff like that. Hopefully, it's about existing on a deeper level. It wasn't very hard for me [to start a new band so deep into my career]. The cool thing is that, for as many records as we've all made, we all feel like this is the first record and it still feels new to all of us."

Like Robinson, as a young musician, Casal used the Grateful Dead as a portal to discover numerous forms of American music. He saw both the Dead and Jerry Garcia Band while growing up in New Jersey and also developed a deep appreciation for other touchstones that Robinson cites, like funk, country and The Rolling Stones. After playing indie-rock bars and DIY clubs for years, Casal is somewhat amused by the current hipster underground's newfound claim to the Dead. He re-entered the Dead's orbit when Adams "was fairly obsessed with the Grateful Dead and exploring those avenues on a vibe level during the *Cold Roses* era, extending into *Easy Tiger*, and that got me into it a little more deeply." In 2006, he played with Lesh for the first time when the bassist sat in with The Cardinals at the Hollywood Bowl. (Casal describes the collaboration as being in the right place with his guitar on at the right time.)

CRB rounded out their initial lineup with Dutton and Sluppick, the latter of whom had clocked in time with Albert King, Robert Walter's 20th Congress, Sha Na Na and JJ Grey & Mofro. From the outset, Robinson envisioned the group as an entirely new band with a new catalog and fresh skull-and-roses identity of their own.

"Honestly, if the idea for the band was to be a satellite of The Black Crowes, then I wouldn't have been interested, personally," Casal says. "Don't get me wrong, I've been a Crowes fan since day one, but I'm not personally interested in playing heavier rock music like that. I'm more into their acoustic side or their country side, but I'm not a rock-star guitar player. To pursue a more Grateful Dead, folk and jazz-inspired thing was much more my taste, especially at this time in my life." He pauses and rephrases his thoughts. "It's not like we can really play jazz, but there's a mindset, an openness within the music. The guitars don't necessarily fill up all the spaces and there's room for all of Adam's keyboard work, which opens up horizons of possibilities. It's just a different kind of music that's coming from a different place."

The Brotherhood jumped in with two feet, barnstorming California clubs in a van and racking up over 100 dates in less than a year while the Crowes were off the road in 2011. For Robinson, who, as MacDougall says, went out on his "first tour in a van and came back in a Learjet," the run was a return to a free-spirited youth playing clubs that he never really had. CRB's contracts stipulated that venues couldn't use the name The Black Crowes in their advertisements, and the quintet quickly started building a setlist full of expansive originals like "Rosalee," well placed soul and classic-rock covers, and enough extended jams to stretch their shows into "An Evening With" engagements.

"I realized this probably was going to be something other than a weekend fling," Robinson says of the run. "I listened to my inner self. I believed in my intuitive nature and I knew this was going to take me someplace else."

"The idea of playing Black Crowes hits was never on the table," Casal reiterates, though the band occasionally dropped some lesser-known

and latter-day Crowes cuts into their shows. "The idea, right from day one, was to create a new band with new original songs and form an entirely different idea that would not be dependent on The Black Crowes' history, songbook or fans. Any of Chris' fans were invited along for the ride, but he wasn't necessarily going after them."

MacDougall explains that, even in those early days, Robinson never gave his bandmates marching orders. "The only thing he ever said to me when we first were talking about this band was, 'Let's not do traditional piano and organ. That's a very Black Crowes sound—try and come up with some other keyboard sound to make it have more Herbie Hancock, more clavinet and synthesizers, and a little more spacey, '70s, future music.'" He says that Casal was hesitant to play extended guitar solos when he first signed up, but he eventually found his place, describing the band as a "show" where each member needs to figure out their "character without acting."

"We bit the bullet early so we could build a business," Casal admits. "It was just a smart business move on Chris' part that if we tightened our belts and we built something real and authentic, then it could sustain itself on its own without bowing to any kind of business pressure. Now, we're the free artists that we want to be and we can live the free artistic life that everyone dreams about. We can play a two- or three-hour show and do it on our own terms. When we make records, we do have assistance from a label, but it's not a huge thing that puts us in debt for the rest of our lives. There's no one barking at us to do anything. We make all the decisions ourselves, and the people that we work with trust us to come up with something good. We put every penny and every ounce of sweat we have into those records and shows because we do have the freedom that we built into the band."

Robinson fondly recalls those early gigs, describing extended tours in a van that was packed "*Tetris* style" as both a chance to form close-knit friendships in their band and to develop their fanbase in a grassroots style. "That's a really unique and special opportunity, and to be making those kind of connections and meeting the people that we meet and seeing the faces," he says. "especially the ones that come to lots and lots of shows—they're like family. That's another aspect of it that's been really eye-opening and super rad."

CRB ended up with a bounty of material and brought their live energy into the studio during a formative early run. They set up in their recording space as they would a live show and released two albums, *Big Moon Ritual* and *The Magic Door*, on both ends of the summer of 2012. Robinson continued to develop his new project between his other commitments and, when the Crowes went back on hiatus in late 2013, the Brotherhood immediately launched into another marathon tour. They also released their third album, *Phosphorescent Harvest*, in 2014. In contrast to "the kitchen sink approach" of their previous twin releases, this time, the band focused on their best new material, most of which Robinson co-wrote with Casal.

> "The only commodity we have in this band is the music itself
> CHRIS ROBINSON

Though Robinson had started to talk about reactivating the Crowes in early 2015, the negotiations quickly went south, reportedly due to financial disagreements. The band officially split up and Robinson threw himself completely into his Brotherhood.

Robinson says he found his return to clubs "more normal than other people because I find that any commercial success that I had was really abnormal in terms of the weird stuff." Despite over 25 years in the public spotlight, a celebrity marriage and even his own episode of *Behind the Music*, Robinson still speaks idealistically and candidly about his music. "All this other stuff will blossom and flower when you make decisions based off of stuff besides money," he says. "That's where I am with this and that's where we are. The only commodity we have in this band is the music itself and what we're making, what we're writing and laying down on a nightly basis. And, as far as I can see, that's where the real connection is with people because we're not on a showbiz trip. If I can be involved in something that's not like everything else, then I'm happy, man, because that's the stuff that inspires me and what still keeps me going. I'm committed to the life of the troubadour, the traveling person who sings for his supper. I still like that poetic idea."

* * *

IT'S EARLY EVENING AND THE members of the Chris Robinson Brotherhood have congregated at a historic local tavern after a long day of recording. In the morning the group will jet down to Southern California for a quick corporate gig, but on this evening, they are sitting relatively unnoticed in a cavernous candlelit room.

Their chatty waitress feels like she knows Robinson but can't place him; after speaking with the singer and his wife for a bit, she thinks she's seen him around the bar. Robinson is a great storyteller whose inquisitive nature and survey of pop culture would make him a great journalist. Currently, he's recounting a crazy late-night P-Funk show he attended, while opening for The Rolling Stones, over a bottle of wine. He's also an avid foodie who often text-messages his friend Sean Brock, a South Carolina chef associated with new Southern cuisine, for menu recommendations. (Robinson first met Brock on a plane, and he says they are part of a mutual admiration society.)

"The cool Southern people are the coolest people in the world," says Robinson, who grew up in Atlanta and has lived in New York and, more recently, LA. "Having a regional identity is important and having those regional identities manifest themselves in cuisine and all sorts of stuff is rad. All the music and the ingredients that make up rock-and-roll come from down South. To be close to the source and that authentic experience, as the world moves further and further away from that into more of a corporate conglomerate place, allows you to feel it. It's real."

Even before Robinson migrated north to Marin, CRB had a distinct San Francisco feel, though MacDougall is quick to note that Dutton was the group's only California native. The band is not entirely sure if their California "smell" is due to their first club tour or overlapping record collections, but he acknowledges their distinct Bay Area vibe. "We are drinking the Kool-Aid, but a little East Coast grim shows through," MacDougall says with a laugh.

As Robinson sees it, their journey is not very different from America's own migration over time. "People take their music and they move it somewhere else; they get a little twist here and a little twist there, and the same old song you thought you heard is completely different," he says. "That's part of being a human being. Historically, we do that as a culture, as a society. Music is just the most vibrant way to see or feel that. Being in a band is the best way for me to try to be in the moment as much as I can. I want to find those places not just onstage playing music, but I actually want to give you a vantage point to be able to do that in other aspects of your life." He also mentions that both of his children were born in California and describes the state as "a mythical place."

"There's a mysticism that's appealed to me—it's as far away from Georgia as you can get and, when I was a kid, my

music and my heart and my expression were unabashedly about leaving where I was from," he says. "My life was going to happen away from where I grew up. To me, California lived large like that. I spent so many years as a transient being, in between living in all these other places. I would stay in California because it was the easiest place to have that lifestyle. It's the backdrop for rock-and-roll and that sound. And, if you're at all in touch with your environment in a sensitive way, of course, that's going to creep out, and what an amazing spot for that to happen. That's all over California; California is an inspiration on its own."

CRB's close association with the Dead, particularly Lesh, has furthered their Bay Area identity. Both individually and collectively, the members of the Brotherhood have backed Lesh numerous times over the past few years, including a marquee set at this summer's Lockn' that also included an appearance by Gary Clark Jr. Despite their deep reverence for the Dead's music—Robinson says he's still "absolutely crazy" about them and a simple mention of John Mayer's name can elicit a passionate rant—the musicians hope to stake their own ground outside the Dead, especially with their new, genre-jumping record. Earlier this year, Robinson's brother blamed The Black Crowes breakup on the singer "just being into the Grateful Dead." Robinson responds to that comment by saying, "That's just a weird thing to say—I don't know what it even means. But, then again, I usually don't understand what he is saying." (He has no comment on Rich Robinson's new band Magpie Salute with former Black Crowes Marc Ford, Sven Pipien and Eddie Harsch, the latter of whom passed away before the band's first gig.)

"The Grateful Dead is the roots, where it forms," Robinson says, mentioning that his band can lay claim to Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Mickey Newbury as influences as well.

Bass Friends: Lesh and Hill share a moment

Stuart Levine

"The real thing, what I can identify with, is how they took the outer shell of folk-band music or jamband music and how that gets twisted through the certain shades and colors of different people's minds and times and experience. It's this ever-flowing river of music that just starts and restarts, and will probably keep going even when we end—from our farthest-reaching ancient past to the same vibrational reality that's in our farthest-reaching future. That's what it's about."

* * *

THE CHRIS ROBINSON Brotherhood has a musical manifest destiny. And while that expansion started on the West Coast, they have continued to break ground in other pockets of the country. In November, they played one of their biggest headlining shows at Port Chester, N.Y.'s Capitol Theatre and have continued to tour like musicians half their age. When Leone joined CRB last year, the band made the decision to stay on the road for another run in order to carefully understand their new language before starting another album.

"There's got to be an intimacy within the music and the people playing it for it to be, hopefully, moving on some level," Robinson says. "That only comes through getting it on many times."

That jolt of energy carried into the Stinson Beach-area sessions. Though CRB tested out "Ain't It Hard but Fair," "Roan County Banjo" and "Oak Apple Day" in 2015, they took pride in crafting ideas as a band and re-evaluating some old fragments with a new perspective. "Leave My Guitar Alone" is based on a super old riff Robinson had laying around for about 16-17 years that developed into an entirely new song.

Robinson says his process has changed a great deal since he was younger, when he'd stay up late into the night writing. These days, he'll put in a few hours when he wakes up in the morning and "hasn't had anything creep in to distract him yet." He attributes his current writing techniques to normal life changes: children, family, responsibility. "But writing is also about doing a little bit of it every day," he says. "Music is a jealous muse. It'll allow other things in your life, but if you give up on the muse, she'll give up on you." And despite his band's affection for long improvisational passages, Robinson still credits their songs as the architects of their jams.

Their new EP, *If You Lived Here, You Would Be Home by Now*, actually feels more in line with the band's past work, even though the material is drawn from the same early 2016 sessions. "Sweet Sweet Lullaby" is a love letter to Gene Clark and other country musicians and singer-songwriters of the golden '70s age, while "Roan County Banjo" is the EP's psychedelic-rock centerpiece. Robinson even sees "New Cannonball Rag" as something of an unofficial band motto, pushing the group down their path.

"We had this great wellspring of tunes and all this expressive outpouring and then, I decided that first record would just be songs," Robinson says. "We're just trying to keep things interesting and we feel honored that we're still able to go into cool studios and make records. If we have an opportunity to release them and do cool, different stuff, that's what it's all about."

And Casal adds, "Chris' prioritizing of good music started right away—the guy always had his head pointed in the right direction. I was listening all the way back when I first heard of him because he would always talk about the records that he loved and that inspired him, and people would go and listen to those albums if they hadn't already heard of them."

CRB are already gearing up to return to the same studio in January to work on their next LP. The group estimates that there are 10-12 new songs ready to go and may very well come up with more ideas before they roll tape. It will be their first record with their current lineup which has, once again, tested out their dexterity on the road.

"Tony and Neal had played with Jeff before he joined," Robinson says of their new bassist, who had also played with Casal in Hazy Malaze. "It's one of those intuitive things where you don't have to play with someone five or six times to see if this is their gig. You can play one song with someone and you know instantly if it has some gravity and you want to keep exploring. Being able to keep away the other stuff that might prevent you from being able to recognize those moments is a unique trick as well."

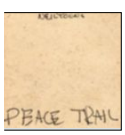
Robinson is toying with a number of other ideas, too. He's thrown around organizing a soul revue with Eric Krasno and would love to work with Brock. But more than anything, he relishes watching his namesake band develop show by show. "If you're lucky enough to have that, you have to nurture it and hopefully it will prosper," he says. "As long as you keep your head down and keep the music as the focus, you're already there. Luckily for us, we love our band and we love our scene, and we're happy to roll up our sleeves and keep on keeping on."

Reviews

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Neil Young

NEIL YOUNG
Peace Trail REPRISE



If you're keeping count, then this is **Neil Young**'s 38th studio album, and he sounds every bit as engaged—both in his craft and in current events—as he did when he wrote "Ohio" back in 1970. With that in mind, it's too reductive to label *Peace Trail* as another notch in Young's prolific protest oeuvre. While he eloquently flaunts his anger in the face of unchecked police aggression, mob mentality and environmental destruction (the pre-release track "Indian Givers," which focuses on the Sioux standoff against the Dakota access pipeline, would do Pete Seeger proud), he's still no less a romantic when it comes to asserting his faith in humanity and his own place in it.

Whatever the stakes, Young's fiery passion—some might even call it his irascibility—fuels the music, as always. It's front-and center-in the opening title cut, which kicks off with Young taking what might be his most moving turn on electric guitar since "Powderfinger," and escalates with lines like "Don't think I'll cash it in yet...because something new is growin.'" His indelible voice, still as clear and supple as it's been for more than 50 years, drives the sentiment home with conviction.

And then there's the small band behind him. With rock legend **Jim Keltner** on drums and session ace **Paul Bushnell** on bass, Young has a go-to rhythm section that adjusts seamlessly to the mood of every song, whether it's the soul-searching "Can't Stop Workin'" (duly punctuated with Young's teeth-grating, hyper-distorted harmonica solo), the intimate and bluesy "Show Me," or the ironic admonition "Terrorist Suicide Hang-Gliders"—a spot-on indictment of Islamophobia and its diseased by-products. It's also worth noting that *Peace Trail* was recorded at Rick Rubin's Malibu-based Shangri La studio; Young and the band sound so laid-back and relaxed, it's easy to imagine most of the album being comprised of first takes.

In the end, there's an obvious reason that Young remains a key influence for so many up-and-coming songwriters. There was a time when the "Godfather of Grunge" label might have been sufficient to explain it, but it goes well beyond that now; put simply, he's still making vital, timely and interesting music, with a finger-on-the-pulse quality that rivals Dylan (the Nobel Prize winner!) in its ability to capture the thoughts, feelings, concerns and triumphs of multiple generations. And if his rowdy set and glowing reception at the recent Desert Trip festival were any hint of what's to come, he's not even close to done yet.

Bill Murphy

Jim James

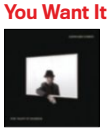
Eternally Even ATO/CAPITOL

Jim James has crafted his *What's Going On* with *Eternally Even*—a swirl of socially conscious lyrics and space-soul grooves. Like 2013's *Regions of Light and Sound of God*, his first venture away from My Morning Jacket, *Even* works within a tight musical palette: James croons protest lyrics and peace pleas over droning organ loops (the two-part "We Ain't Getting Any Younger") and crusty jazz-fusion basslines ("True Nature"), downplaying Jacket's widescreen rock heroics. These songs feel intimate in a new way, with James trusting simple lyrical messages to carry the weight. "Guns drawn, faces long, how much killing can be done?" he ponders on the psychedelic, meditative "Same Old Lie," surveying a violence-rattled America just in time for election season. "It's the same old lie they tell you when you die," he continues in an eerie monotone. "There are mansions up in heaven, 50 virgins off in the sky." Outside of a few stinging guitar riffs, notably the bent-string moan of "Hide in Plain Sight," *Eternally Even* hardly resembles My Morning Jacket—its ghostly beats, airy string lines, and fractured samples more obviously echoing his work on Monsters of Folk's "Dear God." He hits an emotional peak with the closing title-track, a slow-motion tearjerker that moves from the political to the personal. "I hope you're having a wonderful life," he meditates about a former lover, as two massive organ chords cycle back and forth, a majestic seesaw in deep space.

Ryan Reed

Leonard Cohen

You Want It Darker COLUMBIA/SONY



Brace for heaviness on **Leonard Cohen**'s final album, *You Want It Darker*, where it comes in many beautiful and soulful varieties. There's the octogenarian Cohen, his voice reaching for a deepness of its own digging, and—nearly 50 years since his debut—it's at its deepest yet. Mixed full and proud by Cohen's son **Adam** and co-producer **Patrick Leonard**, the creak in Cohen's vocals comes on like a rich stringed instrument—an old cello, maybe—that seems to have gained sentience. And there's the heaviness of Cohen's lyrics, as refined and vulnerable as they are filled with wisdom and so incredibly alive. "I'm sorry for the ghost I made you be," he sings on "Treaty," one of the album's many open moments, "only one of us was real, and that was me," as perfect a couplet about the end of a relationship as any. And keeping it together, the heaviness of the arrangements, which come on like the angel of death with its hand cushioned in velvet, all soft strings ("Steer Your Way") and humming background vocals ("You Want It Darker") and the occasional lonesome pedal steel ("Leaving the Table"). Cohen has long used female voices to help trace the contours of his melodies, partly to add a traditionally beautiful contrast to Cohen's gruffer voice but, on *You Want It Darker*, it's Cohen who sounds unearthly, floating over the arrangements with a benevolent curiosity about the places his voice has been, and where it has left to go.

Jesse Jarnow

Chris Robinson Brotherhood

If You Lived Here, You Would be Home by Now SILVER ARROW

Where **Chris Robinson Brotherhood**'s current LP *Anyway You Love* was a departure, alternating funk with earthy Americana, this EP of offcuts feels like the next record the band's original lineup would have made. It's the return of the cosmic cowboy. Two-fifths of the way through the strutting "New Cannonball Rag," **Adam MacDougall**'s synth melts down; the bass tone gets skronky; the guitars flange. As the sounds grow increasingly weirder, the band shifts further and further into the heavy. The roadsick love ballad "Shadow Cosmos" features MacDougall on piano with **Barry Sless** adding pedal steel. "Roan County Banjo" is the classic CRB cowboy song: a laid-back groove, then the Moog whistles and drips in, **Neal Casal**'s guitar blares, Robinson sings of outlaws and honey and shares his sage wisdom. Then, "From the North Garden" is a Marin County raga with guitars and bass repeating the melodic pattern, flute and sitar tones weaving the tapestry, and some ghostly background singing that sounds suspiciously like Meg Baird. It's psychedelic trope—but here it feels refreshed and transportational. Once that trip subsides, we're left with "Sweet, Sweet Lullaby," which opens with acoustic strumming in a texture that recalls Dylan's *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*. Robinson and Casal sing harmony, MacDougall is again on the piano and Sless is back on steel. This band speaks a tonal language. Robinson barred the B3 organ at its formation, so that even when the modes are simple or old-fashioned, the musicians are forced to avoid sonic clichés. That does keep things interesting.

Richard B. Simon

Norah Jones

Day Breaks BLUE NOTE

"I finally know who I'm supposed to be," **Norah Jones** sings on the jaunty, jazz-rock workout "Flipside," one of many instances on *Day Breaks* where she asserts a confident new beginning, mapped out in part by a return to her musical roots. In a sense, Jones' 2002 debut, *Come Away With Me*, was a rubber-meets-the-road moment in the struggle between jazz and pop—a debate that raged primarily among musicians and critics who questioned the authenticity of "crossing over." The concern seems quaint today when considering the work of artists like Kendrick Lamar, Robert Glasper, Georgia Anne Muldrow and so many more but, for Jones, collaborating with an undisputed heavyweight like **Wayne Shorter**—who appears here right off the bat on the percolating opener, "Burn"—must give her some hint of validation. Not that she needed to seek it; each of her previous five albums for Blue Note (pretty much the last major American jazz label left standing) has never wanted for heartfelt musical snapshots, and *Day Breaks* isn't any different. What stands out is her reconnection to the piano, which hasn't had such a front seat since her debut. And whether it's in the vintage Five Spot vibes of "It's a Wonderful Time for Love," the Van Morrison-style gospel of her cover of Neil Young's "Don't Be Denied," or the smoky yearnings of the Horace Silver-penned "Peace," a not-unexpected maturity seeps through Jones' supple voice. She's hitting a sure-footed stride, with plenty more fruitful miles to go before sundown.

Bill Murphy

Leonard Cohen

Umphrey's McGee

Zonkey NOTHING TOO FANCY MUSIC

The mash-up approach has delivered diminishing returns since 2004, when Danger Mouse's Beatles-Jay Z hybrid, *The Grey Album*, triggered an avalanche of lazy cut-and-paste laptop tweakers. It's an art form with a discouraging shelf life, and the novelty has worn off. But **Umphrey's McGee** rejuvenated the entire concept with *Zonkey*, an album of jolting genre cross-pollination that makes you notice the core similarities between Frank Zappa and Bob Marley, or Fleetwood Mac and the Weeknd. The progressive-jam sextet has showcased this strange skill onstage over the past decade, beginning with their regular Halloween spectaculars, but more nuances cut through in the studio. Rather than following the basic mash-up recipe—pairing one song's hook with another's riff or rhythm track—Umphrey's rebuild these elements from the ground up, re-recording the material instead of sampling it. "Sweet Sunglasses" seamlessly shifts between two '80s synth-pop hits, Eurythmics' "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" and Corey Hart's "Sunglasses at Night," before interpolating the sizzling synth solo from MGMT's indie-funk anthem "Electric Feel." More thrilling is "National Loser Anthem," which highlights the mutual brooding of Beck's "Loser," Radiohead's "National Anthem" and Phil Collins' "In the Air Tonight." The band incorporates a wide spectrum of vocal and instrumental styles, veering from reggae to R&B to metal. (Check out drummer **Kris Myers**' disturbingly spot-on James Hetfield grunts on Metallica-Gorillaz fusion "Sad Clint Eastwood.") Throughout, they weave in elements of the original tracks, sprinkling in manic guitar and synth solos, but these flights of fancy always service the shape-shifting songs. With *Zonkey*, Umphrey's not only makes the mash-up fun again—they've made it edgy.

Ryan Reed

David Grisman Sextet

David Grisman Sextet ACOUSTIC DISC

There's a fine line between *pleasant* and whatever it is that **David Grisman**'s been doing with various iterations of his quintet (and sextet) over the past 40 years. A home for Grisman's mandolin-led hot jazz—and sometimes just ever-so-easygoing, with a tasteful whiff of light percussion and breezy flute—it's also a line that's easy to cross, and Grisman sometimes does. Without careful attention from both players and listeners, the handmade Dawg-grass (or whatever portmanteau you prefer) might blend into the wallpaper in the most cuddly string-band way possible. But that would be to miss out on Grisman's turns and nuances, the quiet dips of "Waltz for Gigi," the elegant maneuvers of "Newly Wedding," the pure moonlight of "Hannah & Rio." It's all subtly show-offy music, to be sure, but the **Sextet**'s tricks and speedy runs are the types of analog special effects that have been endangered since Grisman fell in love with acoustic music in the early '60s—already under the shadow of rock-and-roll—and, in that regard, the new album is a stunt-filled blockbuster. With the departure of longtime percussionist/violinist Joe Craven, David Grisman Sextet has expanded to include both a drummer *and* a fiddler, inching the texture slightly in the direction of a small jazz orchestra, which (cost aside) seems a natural direction for Grisman as a bandleader, too. When the kazoos come out for a faux-jug-band turn through "Dawg's Bounce," the analog special effects go hilariously and unexpectedly widescreen.

Jesse Jarnow

MarchFourth

Magic Number SELF-RELEASED

Maintaining a large band is a daunting proposition, yet **MarchFourth** has kept their 20ish-piece ensemble on the road for 13 years and counting on the strength of their dynamic and circus-esque live show—recording

Reviews

their previous three albums in sporadic bursts during their brief moments of downtime, mostly at home in Portland, Ore. Choosing to mix things up for their fourth effort, the band carved 10 days out of their schedule to spend at The Parlor Recording Studio in New Orleans with Galactic's **Ben Ellman** at the helm. Accordingly, this is a tighter and more cohesive collection of tunes than their prior freewheeling and diverse recorded output. The sounds of New Orleans permeate through all the songs, especially on the **Stanton Moore**-assisted "Push It Back" (co-produced by engineer **Mikael "Count" Eldridge**), and the compact arrangements leave plenty of space for all the instruments to breathe and for the players to express their personalities. It's not all second lines and off-the-one funk though, as the band gets their Dirty South on with "Hotstepper," and both the title track and "Drunk Bears" harken back to the "Marching Band" days, the former featuring uncharacteristically prominent vocals. Unlike other releases, *Magic Number* doesn't quite capture the controlled chaos of M4's live presentation, but that's one of this album's biggest strengths. Instead of attempting to channel alien transmissions through 15 instruments—which works much better when accompanied by a troupe of dancers and stilt-walkers—the band's narrow focus results in a solid funk record.

Wayan Zoey

Jeff Beck

Loud Hailer RHINO

When **Jeff Beck** wants to make some noise, it isn't that hard for him: He plugs in his guitar and takes off. Usually that's all he needs; although he's used vocalists often on his recordings (there was some guy named Rod Stewart on those first Jeff Beck Group albums), his singers' words are not why most fans listen to him. That's what makes *Loud Hailer* such a different—and unusual—Beck project. Amid some of his gutsiest, boldest and most cacophonous guitar work, as well as some of his most ethereal, honeyed and luminous, the man who still might just be rock's most consistently innovative and astounding guitarist is equally concerned with the vocals here. They're supplied by **Rosie Bones** who, along with second guitarist **Carmen Vandenberg**, also co-wrote most of these new songs with Beck. There's anger in their lyrics, plenty of it, an overriding sense of dread and anxiety permeating these songs—from the opening arena-rock salvo of "The Revolution Will be Televised" (turning Gil Scott-Heron's '70s anthem inside out) to the tender "Scared for the Children" to the pensive "Shrine," which closes it out. But there's hope too—an it's-not-too-late underpinning. The lyrics are vital, not to be ignored, but Beck also can't help being Beck, which means you're going to hear plenty of guitar that rips your head off its perch. Where he sometimes leans retro Beck has gone in the opposite direction here: This is very much a contemporary production, hip-hop influence and all, aimed at younger ears. If his goal was to make sure that these powerful messages get heard, then Jeff Beck was smart to make a record that those ears might actually gravitate toward. One thing's for sure though: It will make an impact on anyone lucky enough to hear it.

Jeff Tamarkin

Marc Ford and the Neptune Blues Club

The Vulture SELF-RELEASED

Marc Ford could be considered the epitome of a journeyman rocker. As a member of an A-list rock band (The Black Crowes), a hired hand (given his work with Ben Harper, The Jayhawks, The Original Harmony Ridge Creekdippers etc.) and as a highly accredited producer (with credits that include Ryan Bingham and the Pawnshop Kings among others), he's made his name mostly in the company of others. On the other hand, his output as a solo artist are admittedly fewer and far between. Happily then, his new effort, *The Vulture*, puts his name where it deserves to be, on top of the marquee but, in a real sense, it's actually marking the debut of his new band, **The Neptune Blues Club**, a gritty combo that costars as the Crazy Horse to his Neil Young. The songs follow suit, whether it's raging rockers like "Devil's in the Details," "Shalimar Dreams" and "This Ride" or the ragged and relentless "Arkansas Gas Card" or a tenderhearted love song, "Girl of Mine." Ford and friends have good intents—"All You Need to do Is Love" steadfastly conveys the theme reflected so earnestly in its title—but the frayed arrangements effectively affirm the intent in their designs. That's the way it should be because, if Ford is anything, he's relentless to the core. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Body/Head

No Waves MATADOR

And the award for best use of harmonica by a jamming band in 2016 goes to **Kim Gordon** of **Body/Head**. Arriving midway through "The Show Is Over," the second of three improvised pieces that make up the band's *No Waves*, Gordon—late of Sonic Youth—discovers a whole new use for the instrument. Nominally a guitar duo with **Bill Nace**, the two build jams from silver sound swells, drifting into harsh-edged ambience and punctuated occasionally by Gordon's vocals, all containing more declaration than melody. Recorded live at the Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, Tenn., the operative mode of the music is heavy and serious, the fun and song-forms of Sonic Youth dispensed with like remnants of a more innocent time. Punning on the post-punk No Wave meme that spawned Sonic Youth in the early '80s—and which Sonic Youth at least partially rejected with some of the best hooks in the underground—No Wave and *No Waves* are returns to nothingness, the obliteration of all pop from punk in search of pure art. And now, in quest of that, Gordon's harmonica, run through distortion, is still the most welcoming and human sound on the album. Returning near the coda of the final track, the 24-minute "Actress/Abstraction," the metallic mouth harp doesn't contain the wheezy feels of Neil Young or the speediness of John Popper, but music itself, reduced to the

breath of life, pleading against the chaos surrounding it. *Jesse Jarnow*

Zach Deputy

Wash It in the Water ORGANIC SOIL

With his freewheeling fourth album, **Zach Deputy** goes all out by taking a shape-shifting approach. A veritable one-man band, he adheres to a supremely sunny, anything-goes attitude—one that incorporates rock, rap, reggae, soul, soca, hip-hop and calypso—accomplishing it all with the kind of supreme confidence and credibility required of one who freely delves into those realms repeatedly. Still, Deputy also offers the impression that he's merely dallying in those genres, thanks to a certain spontaneity that informs the album overall. The fact that he plays every instrument bolsters his ability to shift the sound freely, and when he occasionally opts to really show off his skills—as on carefully crafted, uncommonly complex "Jump in the Water" or the unexpectedly introspective "Loving You"—the wider range of Deputy's abilities are fully revealed. Mostly though, *Wash It in the Water* is best described as a kind of unabashed party record, full of singular sentiment and a notable lack of reserve. Indeed, when he plays the role of toastmaster on songs such as "Wash It in the Water" and "Put It in the Boogie," those infectious intents are fully brought to bear. Upbeat and exuberant, *Wash It in the Water* can be considered an ideal album for Saturday night celebration that also offers little impetus for any sort of fuller reflection the morning after. *Lee Zimmerman*

SeepeopleS

Love RASCALZ

SeepeopleS, the Maine-based assembly of musicians under the leadership of singer/guitarist **Will Bradford**, has existed for the entirety of this century and, over that time, Bradford and company have been steadfastly refining and perfecting their jamband-friendly variety of indie rock. Following five full-length studio releases, the band has embarked on a three-EP adventure, to be titled *Love*, *Hate* and *Live*. On the first installment, the band sounds more grown up than ever, though that's at least partially a result of the show-of-age demonstrated by the early-'90s Athens, Ga., vibe of the EP. The music still fits into Guster's corner of the jamband landscape: The lyrics are meaningful, the guitars are jangly and the tempos are mostly on the slower side, save for upbeat opener "Shangri La La." There's also a sonic palate-cleanser in the form of **mosart212**'s remix of "Conifers of China," a track from last year's *Dead Souls Sessions*, but even that seems to fit the vintage indie motif that carries through the EP. It will be interesting to see if this series' remaining volumes of releases continue in the same vein or present a drastic contrast but, in the meantime, *Love* makes for a pleasing, gentle dose of '90s nostalgia. *Wayan Zoey*

Kuroma

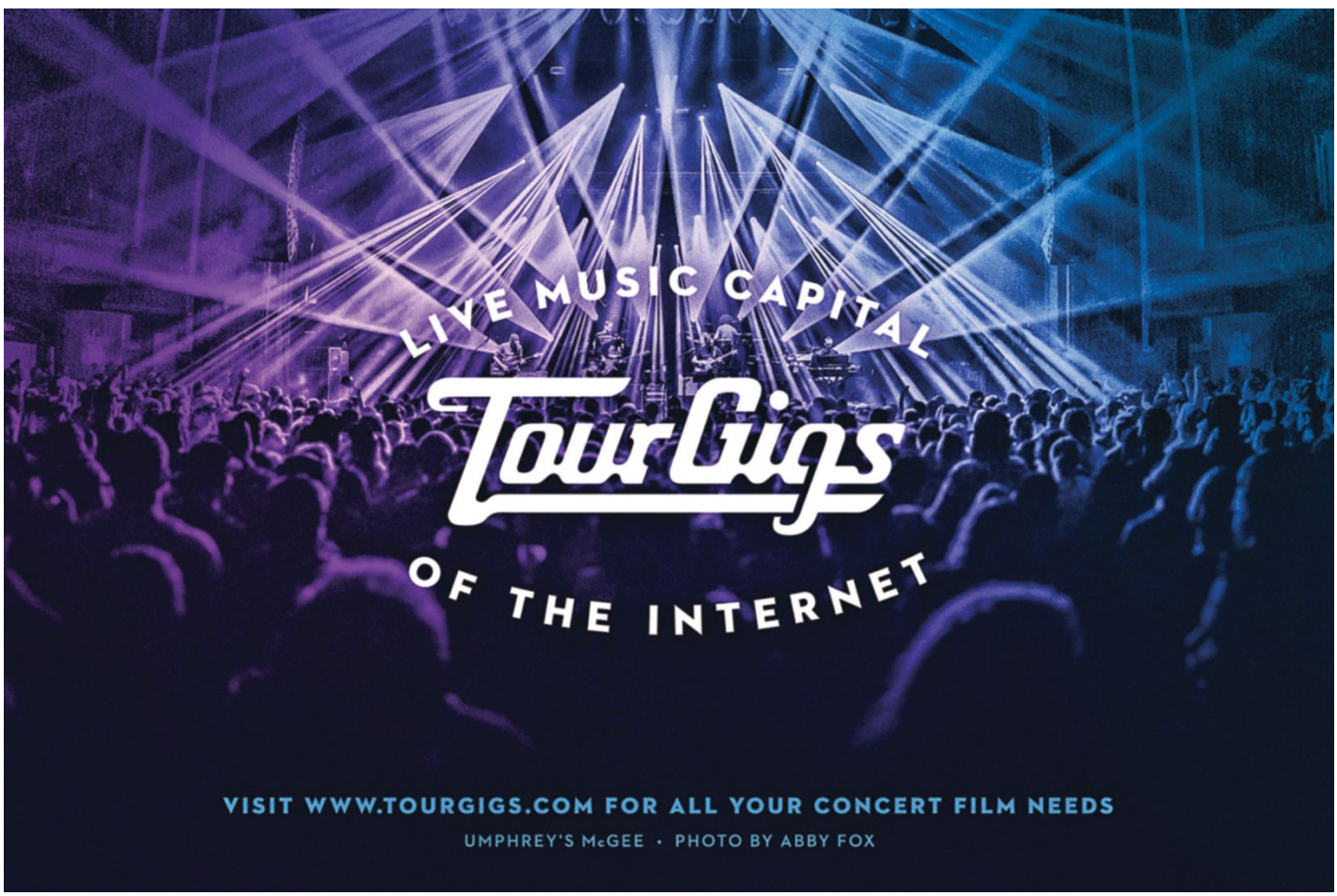
The Dark Horse Rides Again VOTIV

Hank Sullivant's Catholic conversion looms large over **Kuroma**'s fourth LP—but not in the way you might expect. Instead of plastering his psychedelic pop with grandiose church organs and pompous choirs, he's channeled that newfound spiritual freedom into lyrics that equate the ordinary with the divine. "Reality hurts/ even when you're given the delights of the Earth," he croons over baroque strings and flute trills on starry-eyed love song "Perfect Girl," like a hippie Sunday school teacher who spiked the holy water with LSD. Sullivant employs a cosmic sweetness throughout *The Dark Horse Rides Again*, mining the trembling guitar textures of shoegaze icons My Bloody Valentine ("A Day With No Disaster") and the Elephant 6 crew's wistful haze ("A Curse of Mine"). But it's strange that, after discovering his true self through religion, Sullivant's tunes feel less personal—more obviously indebted to his influences. With its incessant, phased guitar throb and whispered vocals, "I'm the Kind" blurs the line between Kevin Shields homage and parody; the repetitive psych-funk vocal harmonies and rote electronic tones of "Uprising" come off like a '90s of Montreal B-side. Still, Sullivant remains a pop craftsman, and the comparisons become irrelevant across a 12-track LP. For all its spiritual nods, his sharpest track is a simple reflection on youth: "I come from the city of Memphis, the birthplace of rock," he reminds us on "Tennessee Walker." As usual, he's lived up to that mighty billing. *Ryan Reed*

Big Gigantic

Brighter Future SELF-RELEASED

In many ways, *Brighter Future* sounds a lot like the **Big Gigantic** that burst out of the festival gates with 2009's *Fire It Up*. Yet the record marks a big step—if not forward, then in another direction—for the livetronica duo, who have teamed up with a diverse array of collaborators to add an oft-missing vocal component to their brand of EDM. The album's first joint effort, "The Little Things," meshes Wild Colonials' **Angela McCluskey**'s soulful ruminations with the tried-and-true build and drop formula, while Dutch singer **Naaz**'s vocal contributions are utilized in much the same way on the LP's title track. If past Big Gigantic offerings have incorporated elements of instrumental hip-hop, then *Brighter Future* finds them diving headfirst into the rap game. The



1 Chris Robinson Brotherhood

"New Cannonball Rag"
From the EP *If You Lived Here, You Would Be Home by Now*
Silver Arrow Records

Chris Robinson Brotherhood's "New Cannonball Rag" can be found on their new EP, *If You Lived Here, You Would Be Home by Now*. Already a staple of The CRB's live sets, it marks the first time the song has been available as an official studio recording. The five-track EP is a companion to their critically acclaimed studio album, *Anyway You Love, We Know How You Feel*, arriving just three months after the release of the full-length.

www.chrisrobinsonbrotherhood.com

2 Roger Street Friedman

"Everyday"
From the album *Shoot the Moon*
Self-released

Shoot the Moon is Roger Street Freidman's reflection of life as an unpredictable and wondrous journey. Set to release in January, the 13-song collection reveals an artist who has come into his own and created a masterful album. The roots of Shoot the Moon are steeped in alt-country, folk, blues, R&B and singer-songwriters like Jackson Browne, Cat Stevens, Don Henley and Paul Simon. "Everyday," featured here, is an infectious and upbeat affirmation on moving forward despite the obstacles that life throws your way. Singer-songwriter Ari Hest and Olabelle's Fiona McBaine are featured on backing vocals.

www.rogerstreetfriedman.com

3 The Portal

"Syth"
From the Movie *The Portal: Rock Odyssey*
Portal Productions LLC

THE PORTAL is part concept, part movie and part performance. Inspired by Burning Man, Pink Floyd, EDM and world mythology. The Portal not only entertains, but also immerses the audience in a journey of transcendence and empowerment. The Huffington Post says, "THE PORTAL is reshaping the art of performance theater."

www.theportalnyc.com

4 Here Come the Mummies

"All Over Now"
From the album *Underground*
Sphinxter

Here Come the Mummies is an eight-piece funk-rock band of ancient Egyptian Mummies with a one-track mind. Their "Terrifying Funk From Beyond the Grave" is sure to get you into them (and possibly vice versa). "... Hit of the night...onstage with moe. in front of 20,000," said Jay Goldberg, SummerCamp Music Festival.

www.herecomethemummies.com

5 Curse of Lono

"London Rain"
From the EP *Curse of Lono*
Submarine Cat Records

CURSE OF LONO was formed in London in 2015 by Felix Bechtolsheimer following the breakup of British roots pioneers HEY NEGRITA. They recently released a stunningly cinematic debut EP that combines spaced-out, harmony-laden indie-folk with driving, gothic alt-rock. CURSE OF LONO's full album will be released early next year.

www.curseoflonoband.com

6 Harlequin Reborn

"Where Lies Eden"
Live
Self-released

Harlequin Reborn are a progressive rock band from the Pittsburgh area comprised of John Blangero (lead vocals, keyboards), Ron Dominicis (guitar), Eddie Costa (bass), Mark Francis (drums), Tom Dyer (keyboards) and Theresa Ross (vocals). A powerful and theatrical live band, they are finalizing their first live album for 2017 release.

www.harlequinreborn.com

7 Dubbest

"Foolish Man"
Live at the Belly Up, 11/25/15
Self-released

Boston reggae band releases 'Live at the Belly Up,' November 25, 2016. The performance features an airtight, high-energy, seamless live set, recorded in Solana Beach while opening for The Wailers. Dubbest recently relocated to San Diego after nearly a decade on the East Coast, and are currently planning another national tour in Spring 2017.

www.dubbestmusic.com

8 Jerome Obholz

"Yeah It's You Girl"
From the single *Yeah It's You Girl*
Self-Released

Jerome Obholz is a drummer and singer-songwriter located in Cleveland, Tenn. He grew up in Cincinnati and relocated to Longview, Texas in early 2016. He is currently is working on a solo EP called *Moments*, which will be released in the fall of 2016. He also contracts out artist and bands that need drum work such as studio sessions, shows and tours. He recently moved to Cleveland in late June to pursue finishing up his *Moments* EP and to be in a more neutral spot for drumming clients.

www.jeromeobholz.com

9 Joe Marcinek Band

"Bernie"
From the album *Slink*
Hitman Records Inc

Joe Marcinek Band is an innovative musical concept that features a different lineup of some of the best musicians from all over the country for each tour, with guitarist Joe Marcinek at the helm. Each show is an exciting exploratory adventure for both the performers and audience, making for unique and spontaneous moments each time a new lineup hits the stage. Shaun Martin (Snarky Puppy) said, "Marcinek is one of the baddest guitar players/singers this side of heaven." Come see why members of Umphrey's McGee, String Cheese Incident, Trey Anastasio Band, moe. and more are joining in the JMB experience.

www.joemarcinekband.com

10 Churchwood

"One Big White Nightmare"
From the album *Hex City*
Saustex

Austin-based experimental/avant-garde blues band Churchwood continue their streak of winning albums with *Hex City*, their fourth full-length release. The band weaves a dense spell of musical voodoo around the tongue twisting incantations of Joe Doerr. Churchwood is recommended for all those who favor artists such as Captain Beefheart, Nick Cave and Tom Waits who push the lyrics and musical boundaries of the blues form.

www.facebook.com/pg/churchwoodtx

11 Live at *Relix:* Béla Fleck

"Big Country"
Live From *Relix*
Self-released

Béla Fleck is an acknowledged master of the five-string banjo. An unassuming artist whose virtuoso performances fuse jazz, rock, Irish balladry and bluegrass, Fleck cannot possibly be confined to a strict genre or even considered "newgrass." His is an original style—a hip, urban sound that just happens to come from a uniquely American instrument traditionally stereotyped as being anything but sophisticated. Time magazine contributor John Elson called Fleck "the Paganini or maybe the Jimi Hendrix" of the banjo, noting that the Grammy Award winner has taken "this jangling folk instrument into jazz, classical music and beyond."

www.belafleck.com

12 JamOFF! Winner: Fake Flowers Real Dirt

"Bullets Thru the Fire"
From the album *Rel#1*
Self-Released

"In the steamy basement of an otherwise unremarkable house in Baltimore, "FFRD" forgets their mix of genres from the funk/drop characteristic. Driving skank reggae moves to frenetic breakbeat/jungle, joined together with a series of quick jazz changes. Simple melodic lines and hooks give ways to solos, with space."

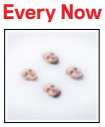
www.fakeflowersrealdirt.com

duo enlists accomplished emcees like **Waka Flocka Flame** ("Highly Possible") and **Logic** ("All of Me") for a pair of laid-back tracks, while up-and-coming New Orleans rapper **Pell** flexes his proverbial muscles on the effortlessly smooth "Miss Primetime." The Trey Anastasio Band horn section is well-represented, too: **Jennifer Hartswick** ("Got the Love," "I've Gotta Know") and **Natalie Cressman** ("No Apologies") each make noteworthy contributions to the record, despite their tracks' noticeably sparse use of horns. Familiar friends **Cherub** ("Wide Open") and *GRiZ* ("C'mon") also make appearances, and the latter's saxophone groove offers the perfect opportunity for interplay with Big Gigantic's own saxman, **Dominic Lalli**. With the exception of the somewhat appropriately titled "Bring the Funk Back"—which is an accurate enough name until the build/drop comes—the album's few instrumental numbers provide a minimalist foil—by Big Gigantic standards—to the unbridled energy that defines the rest of the record.

Sam D'Arcangelo

Jagwar Ma

Every Now & Then MOM + POP



On *Every Now & Then*, Australian trio **Jagwar Ma** follow their 2013 debut, *Howlin'*, with a collection of psychedelic rock that draws on a variety of tones and styles as the 11 tracks unfold. The album, produced by band member **Jono Ma**, who eccentrically recorded the tracks on a sunflower farm in the French countryside, is unabashedly emotional, starting with the second track, openhearted indie rocker "Say What You Feel." The musicians take their time exploring possible sonic territories, especially on "Give Me a Reason," which runs for an energetic, pulsating seven minutes. "Slipping," an introspective, cinematic number, gives Ma and his bandmate **Gabriel Winterfield** an opportunity to lean inward, its moody instrumentals reflecting their melancholy state. Each song embraces its own aesthetic and tempo, but the tracks mostly come together cohesively. Closer "Colours of Paradise," which clocks in at nearly six minutes, favors sparse, ambient beats as a backdrop to Winterfield's aching vocals. The album is raw and sincere, finding its power in moments of quiet emotion rather than in grandiose instrumentals. It's the sort of disc that gives wholeheartedly and unselfishly to the listener, clearly hoping its sentiments will resonate—and they often do. ***Emily Zemler***

Alejandro Escovedo

Burn Something Beautiful FANTASY

For well over 30 years, **Alejandro Escovedo** has made his name as one of the chief architects of insurgent Americana, his strident, unrepentant energy cutting a swatch across rock and roots with deliberate defiance. Consequently it's little surprise to find him returning to his roots with an album that nods toward his punk beginnings and his tenure in bands such as the Nuns and Rank and File—early outfits that paid homage to the roughshod rockers inspired by New York's CBGBs club scene and Britain's new wave rebellion. "When I was a young man, I made a lot of noise," Escovedo reminds us in "I Don't Want to Play Guitar Anymore." Nevertheless, with producers **Peter Buck** and **Scott McCaughey** knowingly guiding the proceedings, he plays with a fury and frenzy that summons the spirit of Lou Reed, demonstrating a grit and determination that frequently brings the Velvets to mind. The tenuous ballads "Farewell to the Good Times, "Suit of Lights, "Thought I'd Let You Know" and the reflective "Redemption Blues" aside, these songs survey a raw, raucous and harrowing terrain, resulting in buzz saw rockers "Horizontal," and "Luna De Miel" and the sing along choruses of "Heartbeat Smile," "Shave the Cat" and "Beauty of Your Smile." Drawing no quarter, these songs also don't seek any in return, making *Burn Something Beautiful* as searing and inflammatory as its title implies.

Lee Zimmerman

Devon Allman

Joe Bonamassa

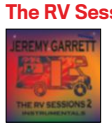
Live at the Greek Theater

J&R ADVENTURES

In many ways, *Live at the Greek Theater* restates the obvious. From a technical perspective, the album is flawless, and if **Joe Bonamassa**'s seemingly rapid rise to the blues' upper echelons where the great guitar slingers reside was any surprise, then the reasons are made perfectly clearly here. Of course, Bonamassa isn't a newcomer; his career began at the age of 13 when he opened for the late B.B. King. However, it's only in the last few years that he's made his mark with the populace as a whole. This double disc finds him opting for an orthodox approach—in this case, lots of big band flourish and wailing riffs in the midst of the brassy back up. He pays homage to the three Kings—B.B., Albert and Freddie—choosing songs that were integral to their individual careers. "Oh Pretty Woman," "Hummingbird," "Going Down," "The Thrill Is Gone," "Born Under a Bad Sign" and "Let the Good Times Roll" are the obvious standbys, with an inexplicable take on "Ole Time Religion" adding some surprise to the proceedings as well. Still, that's the only unexpected offering in a set that's mostly standards. Closing the album with a new studio track, John Hiatt's "Riding With the Kings," adds embellishment but, then again, subtlety is hardly the focus here. An apt summation of the story thus far, it offers Bonamassa a reason to advance onward. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Jeremy Garrett

The RV Sessions 2 OBSIDIAN



For **Jeremy Garrett**, time off from his day job as fiddle player with the Infamous Stringdusters meant hitting the road with his wife in their RV and recording a series of instrumentals dubbed, not entirely surprisingly, *The RV Sessions*. This current effort is a successor of sorts to the original batch released last year and, here again, Garrett follows the same tack, recording solo in his mobile home with original and expressive works that reflect both finesse and frenzy. Naturally, the dexterity he displays in performance with the Stringdusters is evidenced here, whether it's in the elegiac strains of "High on a Ridge," the Celtic-sounding ballads "Land Lubber" and "So Long," the gypsy-like strains of "Ruthless Desperado" or the dramatic sweep of "Tidal Wave" and "Bluegrass Gorilla." As a solo excursion, *The RV Sessions 2* may hold limited interest for those who prefer an ensemble effort with the band and, indeed, the desire for interaction is only natural. Still, the power of the playing and Garrett's ability to create genuine atmospheric ambiance provide a degree of fascination that's well worth exploring on its own. Given his drive and desire, it's clear that Garrett does more than simply fiddle around. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Sleigh Bells

Jessica Rabbit TORN CLEAN

Brooklyn duo **Sleigh Bells** has branded themselves as lovers of cacophony. The band's prior three albums embraced a balance of abrasive noise rock and ethereal pop melody, driven by static-laced sound and aggression. Their fourth release, *Jessica Rabbit*, which is Sleigh Bells' first release on their own label Torn Clean, continues in this vein. Written over the past three years, the album includes 14 mostly short tracks that are defined by singer **Alexis Krauss**' howling vocals and gritty layers of sound that refuse to always be pleasing to the ear. "Crucible" opens with an actual scream and runs on a throbbing, primal beat but transitions into a buzzing acoustic ballad, proving that Sleigh Bells still doesn't need to adhere to any preset ideas about songwriting. "I Can Only Stare" leaves most of the antagonistic sensibility behind, offering a gritty pop anthem that showcases Krauss in real vulnerability. "Hyper Dark," a hushed, ambient number, does something similar. It's refreshing to have these quieter moments throughout the album, because they make the big moments feel even grander and because it's a reminder that there's an emotional openness behind Sleigh Bells' usual bellicosity. Still, though, Sleigh Bells is at their best when they're coming at the listener in full force. Closer "As If" aptly punctuates the album. It's a throttling onslaught of a song, on which Krauss shouts, "Get your shit together." It won't be long until it's the soundtrack to a movie trailer but, until then, it can be the soundtrack to your road-rage-fueled commute.

Emily Zemler

OFF THE TRACKS

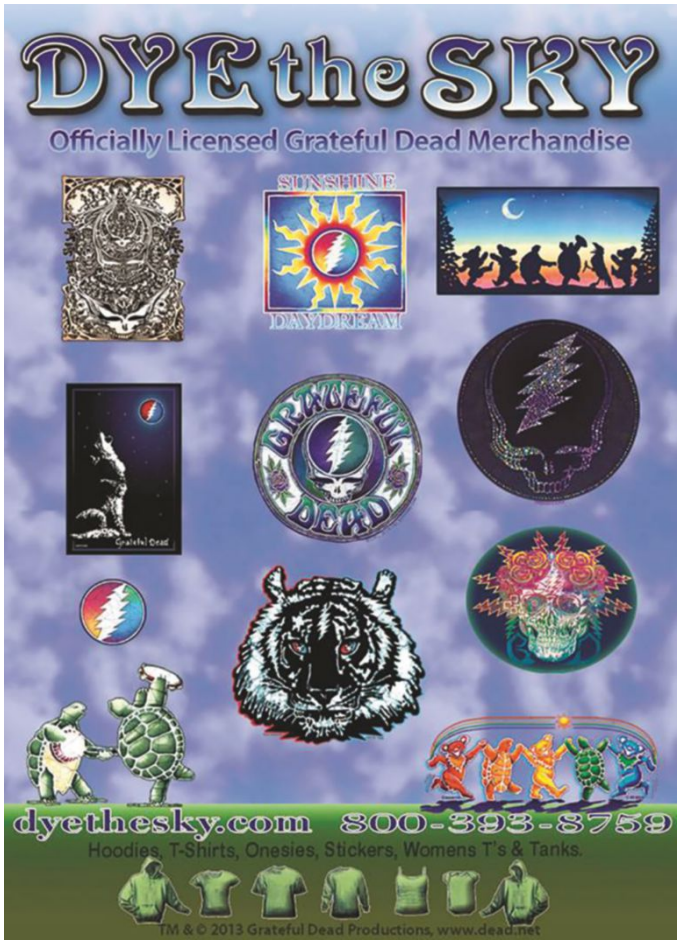
Roger Street Friedman

Shoot the Moon

THE PLAYROOM RECORDS LLC

Roger Street Friedman's sophomore album, the follow-up to 2014's *The Waiting Sky*, opens up with the rollicking "Puffs of Smoke," a seize-the-day charge featuring some New Orleans boogie, courtesy of a veteran horn section and a twangy guitar-and-organ tradeoff. It sets the stage for the eclectic effort that meshes Americana, folk, blues, soul and more. Adding to the mixture are guests like **Amy Helm** (daughter of the drummer for one of Friedman's notable influences) and **Jason Crosby**, a recent Bay Area transplant and jamband-scene mainstay. The album's lead single, "Everyday," echos the opening track's optimism with clever turns of melody and self-aware lyrics like "I'm all right most of the time/ It's just me in the way/ I'm gonna live this life with all my might/ And make the most of every day." Contributing to the guest power, producer **Felix McTeigue** and NRBQ's **Big Al Anderson**, who helped pen "Hideaway"—a lightly rolling rumination on relationships that highlights Friedman's Elvis Costello-esque vocals—both co-wrote select tunes. The bouncy title track brings back the bayou flavor of the opener and proves to be one of the album's high points, capitalizing on the swagger that comes with well-placed hits and wailing backing charts from the impressive horn section.

Matt Inman



Reviews

Empire of the Sun

Two Vines ASTRALWERKS

Expectations are cosmic for **Empire of the Sun**'s third LP. The Australian electro-pop duo are harnessing an unexpected surge of hype after their euphoric, eight-year-old single "Walking on a Dream," crashed the Billboard Hot 100, following its inclusion in a widely viewed Honda Civic ad. That track, a chrome-shiny pitter-patter of programmed drums, throbbing bass and pillowy synth pads, closes out *Two Vines*—a backward-looking epilogue but a smart business move. "Dream" is a once-in-a-lifetime, lightning-in-a-bottle slice of pop bliss, and nothing else here approaches its majesty. But unlike the band's two previous albums, *Vines* is filler-free and jam-packed with bangers of every variety—from EQ-shifting EDM scorchers ("Friends") to melancholy, sweetly strummed power-ballads (the title-track) to space-pop anthems that conjure Fleetwood Mac's underrated '80s era ("Way to Go"). **Luke Steele** and **Nick Littlemore** sharpened their songwriting on 2013's *Ice on the Dune*, but their seductive hooks got lost in the fog of their overblown, in-the-red production—the equivalent of whispering an intimate secret through a megaphone. *Two Vines* course-corrects, maintaining the album's laser focus while reviving the subtler quirkiness of their 2009 debut. On the dynamic "There's No Need," they utilize the impact of negative space, Steele crooning through vivid waves of auto-tune over palm-muted, electric-guitar jabs and flickering synths. In a just world, Empire would dominate the car commercial game—and the pop charts, too. ***Ryan Reed***

Daniel Lanois

Goodbye to Language

ANTI-/RED FLOOR

As gifted a guitarist as he is, **Daniel Lanois** has made sonic alchemy his habitual mode of expression, whether he's tweaking knobs and faders with U2, uncorking *Le Noise* with Neil Young, or producing any number of big names, from Emmylou Harris to Bob Dylan. But one era in particular—his early ambient collaborations with Brian Eno, culminating in 1983's *Apollo*—has consistently inspired his recent solo work, raising the question of whether a reunion with Eno is in the cards. The two have never strayed far from each other, and the connection hovers like a benevolent spirit over *Goodbye to Language*, which features Lanois on pedal steel and **Rocco Deluca** on lap-steel guitar. Sweepingly meditative and lush with almost subliminal, signal-processed melodies, the album is a liquid excursion into how beautiful (and distinctly bluesy, on cuts like "Falling Stanley" and "Blue Diamond") these instruments can sound together. "Satie," named for the French composer, comes across as moody but playful, while "Later That Night" seems to reimagine the skybound theme of "Deep Blue Day" from *Apollo*. Whatever his intentions, Lanois remains soulful and genuine in his musical curiosity—a commitment so immutable and palpable that you can actually *hear* it.
Bill Murphy

Jamie Lidell

Building a Beginning JAJULIN

American soul music has always moved the needle for British-born **Jamie Lidell**; it lives in the thick slices of '70s funk that drove his 2005 breakthrough, *Multiply*, and in the club-ready electronic beats of 2013's *Jamie Lidell*, which was the first album he made after moving to Nashville from New York City. *Building a Beginning* is just that—a reflection of recent changes in Lidell's professional and personal lives, starting with his departure from the Warp label and culminating in the birth of his son last year. With ample reason to celebrate, Lidell draws liberally from the summery, psychedelic-soul blueprint of vintage Stevie Wonder (particularly on "I Live to Make You Smile" and the spacey ballad "In Love and Alone"). Of course, it helps to surround yourself with ace musicians—especially background singers **Kudisan Kai**, **Traci Brown Bailey** and **Tiffany Smith**, who seem to feed off the elation, and drummer **Daru Jones**, whose mind-boggling rhythmic sense on the upbeat "Julian" (named for Lidell's son) and the stone-funky "How Did I Live Before Your Love" is downright Bernard Purdie-like. Happiness is a great motivator, and Lidell makes the most of it on his strongest set in a decade. ***Bill Murphy***

John Scofield

Country for Old Men IMPULSE!

You might be surprised to find Texas swing king Bob Wills in **John Scofield**'s record collection. Then again, as one of the most accomplished guitarists in modern jazz—with an unparalleled rep for technical wizardry and adventurous, probing improvisations—Scofield has also never strayed very far from the blues, so why should country be a stretch? Sometimes the trick is to interpret the singer, which might explain why he chose some of the bluesier classics that make up *Country for Old Men*. (Don't let the title fool you.) He transforms Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" into a blistering one-chord vamp—a prime vehicle for legendary bassist **Steve Swallow** and drummer **Bill Stewart** to crank up the heat while **Larry Goldings** pushes his Hammond organ to a frenetic edge with Dolly Parton's "Jolene." gets more of a Coltrane-esque treatment, with Goldings echoing McCoy Tyner on piano while Scofield explores every facet of the vocal melody in the vein of Trane's "My Favorite Things." By contrast, the quartet hews close to the original flavor of George Jones' "Mr. Fool" and Jack Clement's "Just a Girl I Used to Know," but the statement is clear: Country can swing just as hard as jazz. All you need is the right song, and the right musicians. ***Bill Murphy***

Anders Osborne

Flower Box BACK ON DUMAINE

With a trajectory that encompasses 13 albums—and nearly as many record labels—**Anders Osborne**'s prolific prowess is well established. It's further evidenced by the fact that *Flower Box* is his second offering of 2016, following *Spacedust & Ocean Views*, released this past

February. Yet, while that earlier album contained songs mostly of the laid-back variety, *Flower Box* ups the ante as far as energy, as illustrated by the immediate rush of album opener "Different Drum" and the spirited songs that follow—the loping "Fools Gold," the steadily rocking title track and the sprawling "It Can't Hurt You Anymore." Osborne's relentless wail sometimes brings Neil Young & Crazy Horse to mind—especially when in full flight—but it also retains both a drive and deliberation all its own. For the most part, *Flower Box* offers little in the way of outside embellishment—either melodically or arrangement-wise—suggesting that even this far along, Osborne is simply content to spin his songs in a workman-like manner. The sobriety of "The Gospel of St. John" and the reggae pulse that underscores "Born to Die Together," prior to its fractured finish, dissipate the momentum to a certain degree, but Osborne's head-down approach remains consistent even during the slower moments in the second half of the set. That's especially true of "Old Country," which starts slowly but finishes with a real wallop, bringing those Crazy Horse references back to the fore. Regardless, as both a producer and performer, Osborne has once again proven his prowess. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Devon Allman

Ride or Die RUF

It's taken **Devon Allman** time to emerge from under his father's shadow but now, at age 44—far older than dad Gregg was when he and Devon's uncle Duane hit full stride with the original Allman Brothers Band—he claims an impressive résumé that includes helming his band Honeytribe, occasional work with the Allmans, his all-star assemblage Royal Southern Brotherhood and two previous solo albums—2013's *Turquoise* and 2014's *Ragged & Dirty*. Regardless, *Ride or Die* is his most assertive effort yet, a dozen blistering, bombastic tracks underscored by some fiery fretwork and a voice that's clearly the result of some strong DNA. "Say Your Prayers," "Shattered Times" and "Galaxies" are the best examples of that blustery approach but, even so, Allman does manage to vary the template, adding some soulful swagger to "Hold Me" and "Find Ourselves," and some tempered respite via the troubled "Lost" and "Butterfly Girl." Bundled by a theme that ties a maddening world to the need to cut through the crap, *Ride or Die* covers a broad sweep and carries more than a hint of gravitas. Mostly though, it's a purposeful effort by a second-generation artist well worthy of his pedigree. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Russian Circles

Guidance SARGENT HOUSE

It's nice when bands are consistent. While predictability can be boring, it can also yield serene fulfillment. **Russian Circles** brings anything but monotony to the table while mastering the art of building off previous releases, channeling the best aspects and dialing into them with laser-beam-like accuracy. *Guidance* is loaded with the kind of instrumental-rock brilliance that Russian Circles has often flashed in the past, but elevates its dynamics to a new plateau. Slow, melodic and dreamy, "Asa" opens the album much like the opening track on 2013's *Memorial*, but it's far more of a full-on song than simply a gateway intro track. The furious, drum-led transition into the start of the next track, "Vorel," showcases drummer **Dave Turncrantz**'s dynamic style and explosive precision with classic Russian Circles style. *Guidance*'s sheer brilliance hardly ends there though, blending a fine balance of shoegazey, wandering rock with thunderous post-metal aggressions throughout. "Mota" revisits the band's classic chord progression, which has become something of a trademark, and the sprawling, airy "Afrika" builds and builds, finishing triumphantly. This is by far the most continuous, balanced and downright pleasant Russian Circles album to date. Like a mouthwatering sweet and savory entrée, *Guidance* achieves the type of fantastic balance that bands of this particular genre get fairly close to, but often fail to reach. Six albums in, Russian Circles nail it. ***Mike Thomas***

Jake Shimabukuro

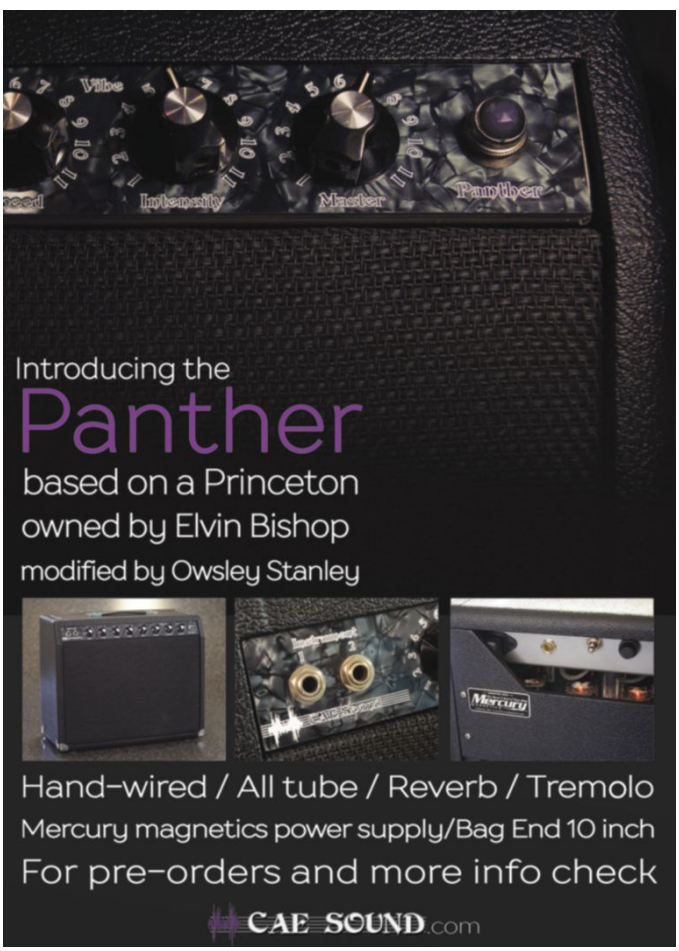
Nashville Sessions SELF-RELEASED

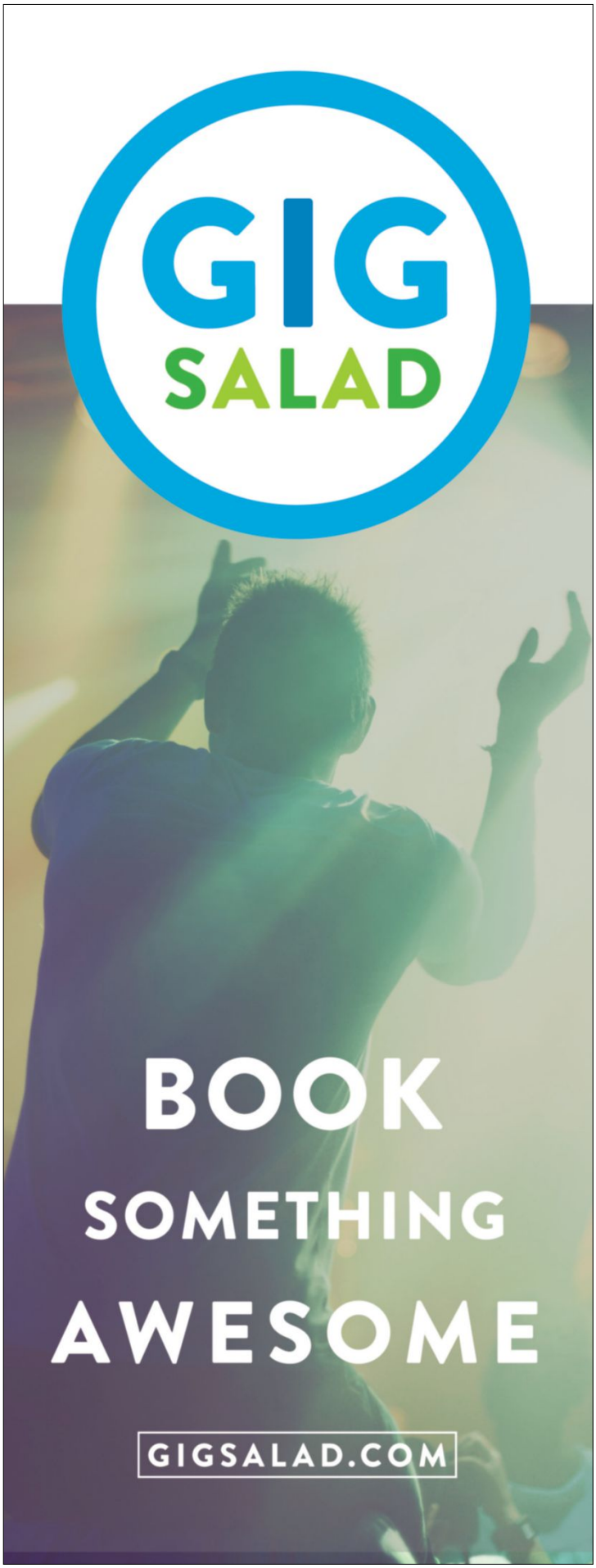
Heavy-metal ukulele? Not what you'd expect on an album called *Nashville Sessions*, but **Jake Shimabukuro** comes close with the crashing power chords he uses to close "6/8." He also uses flurries of stinging, bluesy notes and high-speed rock-guitar-like fills to complement his brief, descending melodic fragments. It's the album's centerpiece and features impressive work by the other two members of the trio, **Nolan Verner**, Shimabukuro's bass player for the past year and a half, and **Evan Hutchings**, a well-known Nashville studio drummer. "Motown" opens with a smooth-jazz intro, Shimabukuro's uke suggesting Wes Montgomery's mellow tones, before shifting into a barrage of rock-guitar noise and finally changing gears to ride a samba-like tempo to its conclusion. Verner and Hutchings bring more of a Motown feel to the rhythms on "F Minor," while Shimabukuro unspools a flamenco-flavored solo. "Hemiola Blues" comes close to punk, with its blazing rhythms and Shimabukuro's lightning fast runs, while "Galloping Seahorses" shifts from a Bach-like fugue into a mid-tempo rocker, with a hint of samba in its rhythm. Shimabukuro's virtuosity on the uke has been startling people since he went viral on YouTube with his arrangement of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" in 2006. He takes off again on this recording, creating a barrage of unexpected sounds and textures that are helping to construct a new language for his instrument. ***J. Poet***

MOSSY

Mossy I OH YOU

MOSSY is the musical project of Sydney's **Jamie Timony**, best known for his acting roles in TV shows like *H20: Just Add Water* and *Wild Boys*. Following up on his punk-rock web series, *These New South Whales*, Timony dives head-first into fizzy, electro-fied rock with





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his new EP, crafting an ornate set of songs triangulating Deerhunter's *Fading Frontier*, U2 circa *Pop* and the openhearted pomp of The Verve. Opener "Electric Chair" crests on a stately beat, with Timony crooning, "The old dog's at it again" over synths and arena-ready guitar theatrics. His stylistic moves are inspired: "Shipping Yard" struts over big-beat loops, and the short interlude "Spa" incorporates acid-jazz reeds and drum programming. "Waterfall" tries on '80s R&B textures, but leans in a little too hard on genre signifiers—a crisp, Prince-style solo and Timony's layered falsetto—to land quite as well as closing song "Ginsberg." Atop a trip-hop soundscape, Timony embraces Bono or Jeff Buckley grandiosity, casting himself as the star of the short film existing in his head, filmed by "the camera" in his "mind's eye," and inviting the wide-eyed listener to luxuriate in his melodrama.

Jason Woodbury

Drive-By Truckers

American Band ATO

Southern rock is more than just a sound or a state of mind—it's an *ethos*, inspired by rebellion, devil-may-care swagger and a heavy dose of bluesy romanticism. Going on 20 years now, **Patterson Hood** and **Mike Cooley** have praised iconic groups like Lynyrd Skynyrd while flouting the dark underbelly of conservative politics in the South, but rarely with the bled-through conviction of *American Band*. Hammering the point home, Cooley's "Ramon Casiano," named for a Mexican teenager murdered in 1931 by future NRA leader Harlon Carter, kicks off the album with a stinging indictment of border obsessions, while Hood's "What It Means" protests the racial injustice behind the killings of Michael Brown and Trayvon Martin. Like "Guns of Umpqua," "Surrender Under Protest" and the riveting "Ever South," the overarching theme here is topical and tendentious—and yet the music never takes a back seat. Whether they're laying down a Stones-worthy honky-tonk ("Kinky Hypocrite") or a spooky alt-country groove ("Baggage"), the Truckers deliver with a sharp, teeth-gritted focus—thoroughly undaunted, if not outright angered, by the awful events that moved Hood and Cooley to take a stand in the first place. In today's soundbite-driven culture, that's saying something.

Bill Murphy

Lambchop

FLOTUS MERGE

For three decades, Nashville's **Lambchop**, led by the dour songwriter and vocalist **Kurt Wagner**, has blended country, soul and mood music. Wagner has built the band's discography on heady synthesis, but *FLOTUS (For Love Often Turns Us Still)*, the group's 12th full-length, is likely to throw more than a few fans, as it features 11 songs fusing subtle R&B, funk, minimalist loops and Krautrock underneath Wagner's dulcet voice, electronically processed like never before. Reportedly owing to the influence of Kanye West and Rihanna (and the more avant-garde approaches of Shabazz Palaces), Wagner's voice is obscured and blurred by heavy processing, distorted and taking on otherworldly qualities. Like young rappers such as Future or Desiigner, Wagner uses the electronic effects to make his voice a textural element in the songs, but he maintains the sumptuous quality that's always defined Lambchop records, his falsetto peppering "Directions to the Can" in between the repeated mantra "Take it on the chin," and his voice evoking the warm, melting quality of recent Brian Eno recordings on "Howe." Bookended by two long-form compositions, the nearly 12-minute "In Care of 8675309"—a fairly standard Lambchop song, minus the vocal filters—and the 18-minute electronic patchwork "The Hustle," *FLOTUS* recalls Wagner's work with electronic group HeCTA, but it's still definitively a Lambchop record. Even with its pulsing beat, the languid guitar lines and gentle strut of "Old Masters" recalls 2000's *Nixon*; "Writer" even features acoustic guitar and earthy woodwinds over its percolating shuffle. No matter what new elements Wagner folds into his sound, it remains a singular, idiosyncratic one: sly, funny and moving.

Jason Woodbury

Magic Trick

Other Man's Blues EMPTY CELLAR

Songwriter **Tim Cohen** knows the value of variety. His primary band, The Fresh & Onlys, traffics in garage rock, but excels by injecting new-wave romanticism and folk-rock jangle into its songs. Outside of the group, Cohen experiments under a number of guises—like his pseudonym Feller Quentin and his black-metal project Amocoma—but recently, his most compelling work has been with **Magic Trick**, which began as a solo project but has morphed into a full-fledged band over the course of the decade. The group's latest is a mixed bag of gems: Opening with a swirling psych number, "More," Cohen detours into coursing post-punk ("I Held the Ring"), soulful R&B ("Startling Chimes") and sparkling indie-pop (moments of "Mockingbird" almost recall Wings' *Band on the Run*.) Interestingly, *Other Man's Blues* offers twangy and rootsy parallels to The Fresh & Onlys' template. "Eternal Summer" opens with Tom Petty moves—stinging blues guitar and swelling organ over a steady backbeat. "First Thought" evokes the open-ended exploration of mid-'70s Dead (at six minutes, it's the record's longest song) and dabbles with AOR electric piano and a breezy, California country-rock bounce. Cohen never aims for cohesion as much as he aims to please, and Magic Trick's latest finds him and the band pulling off every look they try on.

Jason Woodbury

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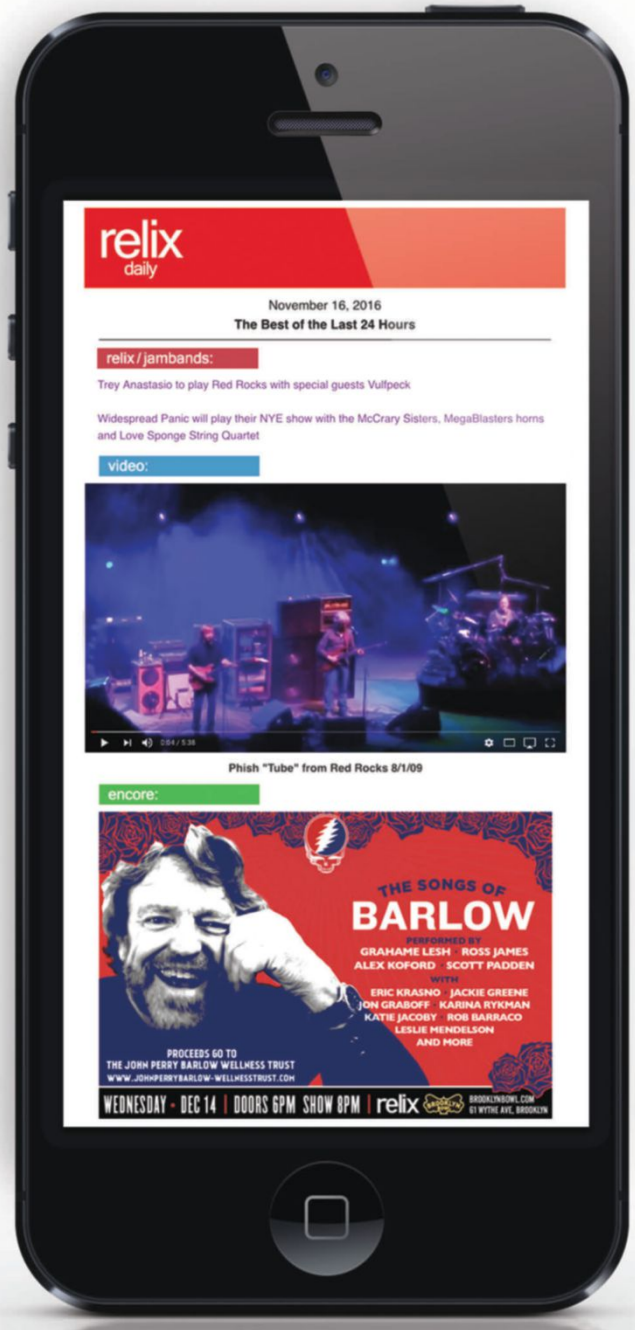

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Eric Clapton

Live in San Diego with Special Guest JJ Cale REPRISE

It might be sacrilege to say, but over the last couple of decades, **Eric Clapton**'s live albums have sounded a bit spotty. *One More Car, One More Rider*, recorded in 2001 on tour in LA, suffered from schlock envy. During Cream's 2005 reunion concerts at Royal Albert Hall, the confrontational fire still burned hotly between Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, while Clapton seemed to stand aloof from it. And a few years later, Steve Winwood carried most of the Madison Square Garden shows; at times, Clapton almost faded into the role of sideman, with the notable exceptions of "Low Down" and "After Midnight," both of which happen to have been written by **JJ Cale**.

Simply put, there's something about Cale—the enigmatic, spotlight-averse singer-songwriter from Oklahoma City who died in 2013—that brings out the best in Clapton. That's undeniably true of this San Diego date, taped in 2007 and featuring Cale on five songs, including the rousing "Don't Cry Sister" and the hardboiled classic "Cocaine." And with a band behind him that features **Derek Trucks** and **Doyle Bramhall II** on guitars (along with the locked-tight rhythm section of **Willie Weeks** and **Steve Jordan**), there's plenty to keep Clapton inspired—especially in the funky breaks of the nearly 10-minute "Got to Get Better in a Little While," and the extended vamp of "Layla," with Trucks emulating, even transcending, Duane Allman's fabled slide-guitar accents. Hands down, this is the best live album that Clapton has put out since his '70s heyday. ***Bill Murphy***

The Bad Plus

It's Hard

OKEH/SONY MUSIC MASTERWORKS

As impressive as their original compositions are—and that's what they've been concentrating on for most of the 2010s—**The Bad Plus** are at their most audacious when they reconstruct others' songs. Pianist **Ethan Iverson**, bassist **Reid Anderson** and drummer **David King** are omnivores who comb all genres for material. (In 2014, they devoted an entire album to Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.) This new all-covers set jumps around from Johnny Cash to Crowded House to Kraftwerk to, um, Barry Manilow (seriously, "Mandy" kills)—and never do those choices feel gratuitous or ironic. *It's Hard* doesn't waste any time raising eyebrows; the trio's opening take on the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' "Maps" is in free-fall from the moment it begins, explodes outward from there and, if you sometimes strain to find the reference points, that's half the fun. Prince's "The Beautiful Ones" is slavish neither to its creator's melodies nor beats, yet it succeeds as loving homage despite that; Cyndi Lauper's "Time After Time" uses both the original and Miles' straightforward reading as frameworks, then goes somewhere else altogether. Oddly—or maybe not—the tunes that you most expect to jump headfirst off a cliff are the ones that play nice. The Ornette Coleman cover, "Broken Shadows," is just heavenly: melodic and calming, as much a rethink as those songs torn apart at the seams. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Tycho

Epoch GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

Scott Hansen's third album, 2014's *Awake*, blossomed like a black-and-white film into vivid Technicolor. Joined by a live drummer and guitarist, the California instrumentalist expanded his drowsy electronica with shades of chiming post-rock–like Boards of Canada outfitted with U2's organic stadium catharsis. The only downside was variety: Once you heard one melancholy groove, you essentially heard them all. Hansen remedies that problem with *Epoch*, which explores a wider range of instrumental quirks on a broader canvas of moods. There are forays into throbbing, festival-friendly EDM ("Horizon") and electro-prog ("Slack," set in a menacing 7/8 time). And while those Edge-styled lead guitars still carry the melodic weight, **Tycho**'s rhythm section is more vital this time around, from the staccato bass pulses of "Glider" to the jittery, jazzy drum fills of "Division." Like its predecessor, *Epoch* fizzles out at the finish line, lumping a pair of sleepy should-have-been-interludes (ambient synth piece "Continuum," guitar reverb showcase "Field") back to back. Despite its anticlimactic sequencing, Hansen's latest LP still probes deeper than his previous work, triggering as much angst as bittersweet introspection. ***Ryan Reed***

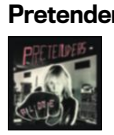
Pixies

Head Carrier PIAS AMERICA

It ain't easy being **Black Francis**—but then again, that's kind of what makes the **Pixies** still work as a unit. His ability to juggle a solo career while spearheading the band's much-touted 2003 reunion was nothing short of miraculous; when Kim Deal decided to call it quits again in 2013, it might have been over for good, until Argentine bassist **Paz Lenchantin** stepped into the picture. Her fluid basslines lend a jolt of energy to *Head Carrier*, which finds the band sounding heavier and more groove-driven than ever. From the thrillingly confrontational "Baal's Back" to the surf-thrashy "Um Chagga Lagga," Francis throws himself into the session (recorded at London's famed RAK Studios) with a youthful abandon that belies his 51 years; by the time he gets to the pop jubilation of "Plaster of Paris," the sense of unfettered joy is so thick you can almost spread a slab of butter on it; the same goes for the opening title cut, which shimmies and shakes like the floorboards of the tiny Boston clubs that the band called home back in the late '80s. It isn't an easy feat for a band to retool and reset this radically and still come across as sure-footed and confident, but Francis and the Pixies somehow get it done, with promising signs of plenty more to follow. ***Bill Murphy***

Pretenders

Alone BMG



The first thing you need to know about *Alone*, the **Pretenders**' 10th album, is that there aren't any Pretenders on the record, save for **Chrissie Hynde.** It was first conceived as a follow-up to Hynde's 2014 solo debut, *Stockholm*, but all that changed when the musician tapped **Dan Auerbach** to produce. She seems to have found a musical soulmate and perfect foil for her cool-as-an-oyster vocals and willful, take-no-prisoners aesthetic in the longtime Black Key. Although Auerbach was only a year old when the Pretenders released their first record, those Rust Belt forces that gave birth to Hynde's rock action and sullen defiance are the same things that shaped The Black Keys' American primitivism 20 years later. When the two joined forces, it was clear that these smart, snarling, confrontational songs demanded to be released under the Pretenders rubric.

With a backing band that Auerbach put together—which includes two members of his *other* band, The Arcs—the pair of Akron, Ohio natives fashioned something as dangerous and musically predatory as anything that either of them have done alone. This is clear from the haughty title track, which finds Hynde "crawling the streets"—much like Lou Reed did when he walked on the wild side 44 years ago—extolling the joys of solitude, and telling anyone in hearing distance, "I'll do what I want." No surprise there. But if there is one, it's the biting and excruciatingly forthright confessional "I Hate Myself," which rings with self-recrimination, candor and truth, and has the vibe of a later-day Johnny Cash album. Maybe it was the exercise of penning her autobiography last year, or Auerbach's suggestions that she go deep, but the emotionally austere rocker seems to have let go of some of her famous reserve and, after all these years, is allowing us to see what's really going on underneath those bangs. ***Jaan Uhelszki***

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Soul cycles. Indian-American singer **Amirtha Kidambi**'s **Elder Ones** take the long view on *Holy Science* (Northern Spy), a darkly beautiful four-part improv journey based on the Hindu yugas, or cosmic epochs. (We're currently suffering through Kali, the last and worst.) The New York experimentalist accompanies herself on harmonium as she vocalizes wordlessly, gradually engaging and disengaging with her collaborators: saxophonist **Matt Nelson**, bassist **Brandon Lopez** and drummer **Max Jaffe**. It's a slow, steady circular sound whose recurring feeling of emptiness is refilled with solos and minimalist meditations on space, time, and the whole eternal fandango.

Kitschen sink. Sergio Leone's twangy spaghetti-western guitars and ethereal female crooning meet Herb Alpert's Tijuana Brass amid a nest of other progressive-kitsch moves on Tredici Bacci's effervescent *Amore Per Tutti* (NNA Tapes). Led by former Guerilla Toss member Simon Hanes, Tredici Bacci is a 14-piece, classically trained outfit specializing in repurposed French and Italian movie sounds augmented with guest vocalists. Perky horn arrangements, a sassy accordion, and swinging strings add gorgeous sixties fizz to songs about young urban sophisticates ("Modern Man," "Slusher"), a swank take on an Italian standard ("Nessun Dorma") and a back-alley throw down ("Give Him the Gun").

Amazonadelicado. Multi-instrumentalist **Joshua Camp** runs the Amazonian voodoo down on *Miracles & Criminals* (Peace & Rhythm), his heady and suavely grooving debut album as **C.A.M.P.O.S.** (i.e., **Cumbias and More Psychedelic Original Sounds**). Assisted by fellow Chicha Libre member **Neil Ochoa** on percussion, Camp has assembled 31 tracks in nearly as many styles over 80 minutes. His sonically adventurous double-disker suggests the sort of studio wizardry Todd Rundgren, Pink Floyd or Ween might have added to Latin America's most popular rhythm. Camp's songs about slavery, robbery and capitalism serve both as head-trips and reality checks.

Still slitherin'. A 71-year-old master who's been battling cancer for the past couple of years has recorded one of the year's great instrumental guitar albums. Helped out by a few Ryley Walker cohorts, **Harvey Mandel**'s *Snake Pit* (Tompkins Square) is a late-career wonder, a casually grooving guitar circus of kaleidoscoping ideas and otherworldly harmonics. Known as "The Snake" due to his swanky sustained notes, the pioneering fret tapper played with every bluesman in Chicago (check out "Ode to B.B.") before joining Canned Heat just in time for Woodstock. *Snake Pit* ranges from the title track's cosmic boogie to the authoritative skronk of "JackHammer" [stet].

Recast from the past. A remarkable blend of San Francisco and Rolling Stones-ish sensibilities, *Terry Dolan* (High Moon) was recorded in 1972 but disappeared when Warner Bros. declined to release it. The Connecticut-born singer-songwriter's rocky debut features three swell guitarists in **John Cipollina**, **Neal Schon** and **Greg Douglass**. The music's a rough-and-tumble mix of rollicking blues-rock and folk-rock balladry elevated by **Nicky Hopkins**' spirited piano playing, the **Pointer Sisters**' churchy backing vocals and **Terry Dolan**'s natural warmth. With Dolan, Hopkins and Cipollina currently swirling in the heavens, the album's reappearance resembles a newly unearthed shoebox of dusty yet treasured photos of a bygone era.

GARCIA'S

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07 DEADCENTER
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10 GRATEFUL ROCKERS - THE MUSIC OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD WITH
STELLA BLUES BAND
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10 DEADCENTER ON THE WEEKEND
STELLA BLUES BAND

13 JIM BREUER
AND THE LOUD & ROWDY

14 DEADCENTER
TERRAPIN

21 DEADCENTER
DEADGRASS
HOLIDAY TOY DRIVE FOR THE PORT CHESTER CARVER CENTER

23 STELLA BLUES BAND'S HOLIDAY JAMBOREE

JANUARY

05 SPIRITUAL REZ

06 SET THE CHARGE
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07 BABY DYNAMITE

11 "PLAY DEAD"
GRATEFUL DEAD OPEN MIC FT. MEMBERS OF
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13 107.1 THE PEAK PRESENTS
LOST LEADERS

14 KIDS GONE PHISHING IN NEW YORK WITH
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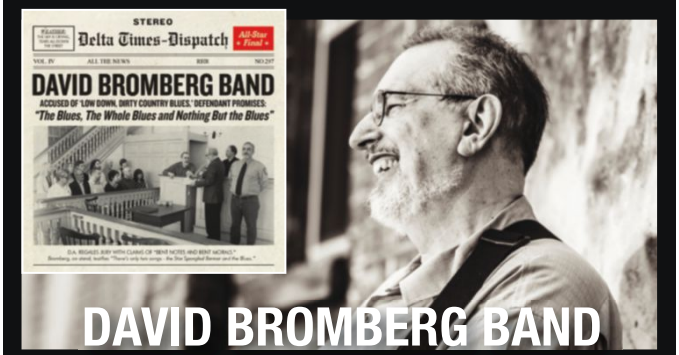

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Plundering the Vaults

Hart Valley Drifters
Folk Time ROUND/ATO

What a remarkable document this is. In late 1962, a 20-year-old banjo player and guitarist named **Jerry Garcia**, along with four other acoustic musicians, entered the studio of Stanford University's radio station KZSU, in Palo Alto, Calif. One of those other fellows, named **Bob Hunter**, played upright bass. Another, **David Nelson**, played guitar. The three of them sang and, together, with Dobro player **Norm Van Maastricht** and multi-instrumentalist **Ken Frankel**, they called themselves the **Hart Valley Drifters**. The recording of their set—mostly filled with traditional bluegrass numbers—languished for nearly 50 years. Now, discovered and cleaned up, it's finally out, giving us access to the earliest known music of Garcia (as well as future Grateful Dead lyricist Hunter and New Riders founder Nelson). Historical value aside, it's an exciting collection—Garcia was already a remarkably facile player and nuanced vocalist. His lead vocal on "Pig in a Pen," a trad number that would become a staple of his short-lived bluegrass side-project Old and in the Way, a decade-plus later, contained all of the warmth and command he would fine-tune with more experience. And the picking, too, is superb: "Cripple Creek," an instrumental breakdown, barely lasts a minute and a half, but both Garcia's banjo and the guitar-playing are equal to that of any major folk festival habitués of the time. There are harmony-rich ballads, gospel celebrations and retooled blues—one of which, Walter Jacobs Vinson and Lonnie Carter's "Sitting on Top of the World," closes the program—that would surface five years later on the Dead's debut as a blasting electric rocker. Here, with Garcia switching to guitar, it's tender and spare, reminiscent of the style the Dead would use in their acoustic sets of 1969-70. This music offers only scant hints of what was to come, but that's OK; as a stand-alone, it's a thing of beauty. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Margo Guryan
29 Demos MODERN HARMONIC

These demos were made to sell **Margo Guryan**'s songs to potential singers who might make a hit with them. They're a little like those Bob Dylan recordings that became *The Basement Tapes*—not intended for commercial release but meant to pitch songs. But that's a little misleading because these are fully realized songs with studio production and elaborate instrumentation and arrangements. It isn't a kitchen-table recording. Guryan made soft-serve pop that had cotton-candy wisps to it, made for sweet-layered vocal harmonies, string arrangements and vibraphone accompaniment. At times, Guryan sounds like Vashti Bunyan with go-go boots, singing in hushed near-whispers. Guryan was a secret pop genius, letting her jazz-classical background shape her inspiration from The Beach Boys. She was married to trombonist/composer/arranger and longtime Jimmy Giuffre collaborator Bob Brookmeyer. Guryan smuggled complexity—harmonic surprises, hip phrasing and baroque counterpoint—into music that has a buffed surface. Fans of Moe Tucker's vocals with The Velvet Underground will enjoy "I'd Like to See the Bad Guys Win." And fans of the meshed vocal harmonies of The Free Design and The Mamas & The Papas will find plenty to soak up here. A highlight of the double-album collection—released on colored vinyl (one red, one blue)—is the lieder-like "Think of Rain." This set captures why '60s pop fetishists speak of Guryan as a secret treasure. *John Adamian*

Various Artists
Bobo Yéyé: Belle Époque in Upper Volta NUMERO GROUP

This anthology captures a moment of national-identity formation and pop-culture flowering in Upper Volta, the West African country that became Burkina Faso in 1984. The recordings included in this collection/art book are mostly from the '70s, made in Bobo-Dioulasso, Upper Volta's second-largest city. Also included are over 100 dynamic black-and-white photos that document the period, capturing nightlife, partiers, politicians, elders, musicians and others, all through the lens of photographer **Sory Sanlé**, who ran a busy portrait studio. As in many other newly independent African countries, the people of Upper Volta asserted their national pride, their triumph over colonialism, by showcasing popular local music styles, many of which featured elements of Afro-Cuban dance bands blended with traditional melodies and instruments. The groups in this anthology are interconnected, with many of the players emerging from Volta Jazz, essentially the country's first big group. Singer **Coulibaly Tidiani**, originally from neighboring Mali, eventually split from the band and fronted his own outfit, **Dafra Star**, which incorporated balaphone. Upper Volta may have been landlocked, but the growth of the railroads meant that music from other regions made its way there. In addition to the Afro-Cuban dance tunes, with horns and rumba grooves, Congolese guitar lines can be heard in the music of **Les Imbattables Leopards**, and the long-form soul-funk of Afrobeat seems to be coming through in some of the tracks from **Echo del Africa**. Students and fans of West African popular music will certainly find this lavish set to be engaging to look at and listen to. It offers insights into the ways that the culture of Burkina Faso connected with the surrounding region. *John Adamian*

Jimi Hendrix
Machine Gun: The Fillmore East First Show 12/31/69 LEGACY

When **Jimi Hendrix** walked out onto the stage of New York's Fillmore East on Dec. 31, 1969, for the first of two shows that long night (with two more sets the following evening), he wasn't only looking ahead to a new decade, but to a new Jimi Hendrix. He'd already

put the Experience behind him and his new trio, **Band of Gypsys**, was intended as nothing less than a complete reboot. The songs they performed–all of the old ones were jettisoned–were funkier, deeper, darker. The new rhythm section, bassist **Billy Cox** (an old Army buddy) and drummer **Buddy Miles** (formerly of The Electric Flag), was less flamboyant than the Experience, coming from R&B rather than psychedelic rock. The original *Band of Gypsys* album, released in 1970, gave only a taste; it received mixed reviews at the time but, today, is considered a classic. This new set, the first of the four shows in its entirety, isn't substantially different but it does contain moments that at least rival and occasionally surpass the original. The much-hyped title track is one of them: It spends its first few minutes as a slow boil, leading ultimately to a solo that embodies the full range and sheer audacity of Hendrix's guitar playing. "Lover Man," the show's second number, and "Ezy Ryder" find the rhythm section uncaged and raring to bust loose–Hendrix is happy to oblige. Even a straight blues like "Bleeding Heart" transcends, opening Hendrix to new possibilities. Those possibilities were never to be realized: Band of Gypsys quickly imploded, Hendrix floundered throughout the year, and on Sept. 18, 1970, he was gone. *Machine Gun*, like the original *Band of Gypsys* LP, is more about promise than fulfillment.

Jeff Tamarkin

The Turtles

The Complete Original Album Collection MANIFESTO

The Turtles

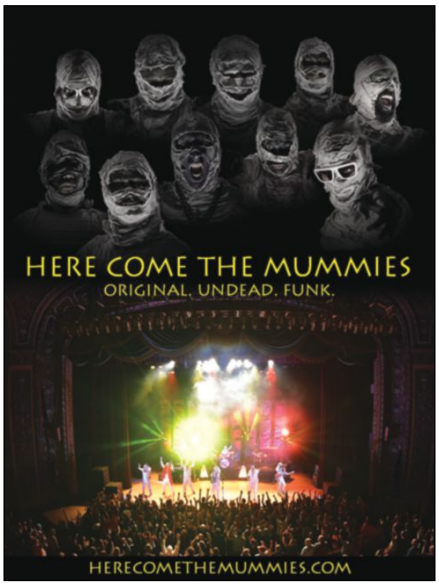
All the Singles / The Complete Original Album Collection MANIFESTO

If **The Turtles** had left behind nothing but the 1967 No. 1 hit "Happy Together," then they'd have been one of the great one-hit wonders of all time. Toss in their other Top 10 singles, including "She'd Rather Be With Me," their cover of Dylan's "It Ain't Me Babe" and "Elenore," and now we're talking a consistent source of diversity and creativity throughout the last half of the '60s. But even then, that's far from the end of the story. One of very few LA-area bands of the era that didn't use studio musicians, The Turtles (whose label basically let them do whatever they wanted) were largely responsible for forging their own destiny. And so they did, releasing dozens of innovative singles and six albums until they finally collapsed, vocalists **Howard Kaylan** and **Mark Volman** crawling off to join Frank Zappa's Mothers. These new packages offer two different perspectives: The six-CD *Complete...* includes all of the albums along with loads of bonus tracks, charting the band's growth from folk-rock

The Turtles

newbies to polished pop-meisters and conceptualists (1968's brilliant *Battle of the Bands*, the flawed but still-wondrous **Ray Davies**-produced *Turtle Soup* from '69). If that's too much Turtles, then the definitive *All the Singles* will do just fine. Two discs, 48 tracks in all, several previously unissued, it features the hits, of course (the P.F. Sloan-penned "Let Me Be" and "You Baby," the gorgeous Byrds cover "You Showed Me") but goes far beyond that. Beautifully sculpted, smartly produced tracks like Judee Sill's "Lady-O" and the early Warren Zevon garage-rocker "Outside Chance," along with several group-penned outliers (the trippy "Sound Asleep," "House on the Hill") add up to a collection that's as essential as any other '60s band's.

Jeff Tamarkin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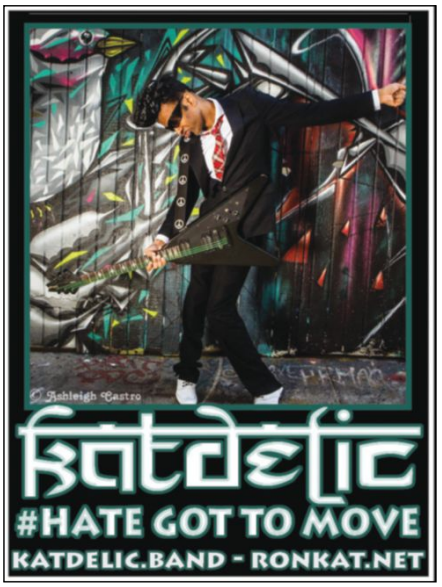
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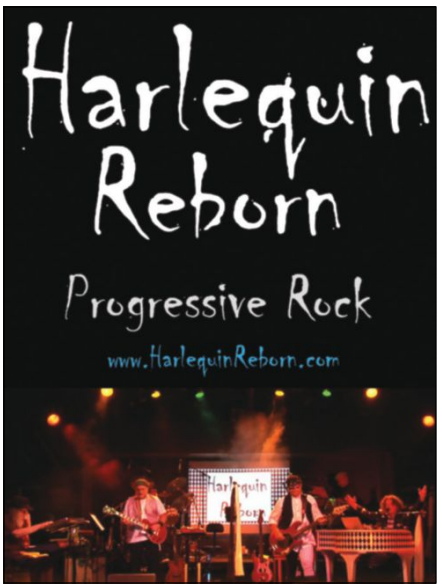
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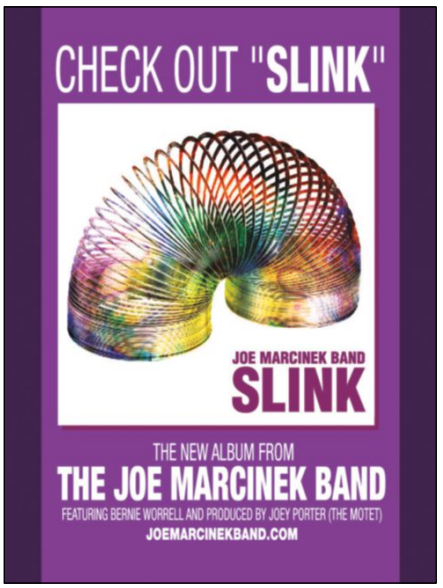
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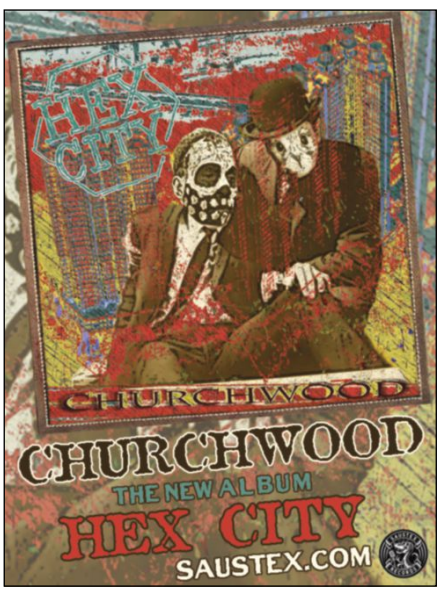
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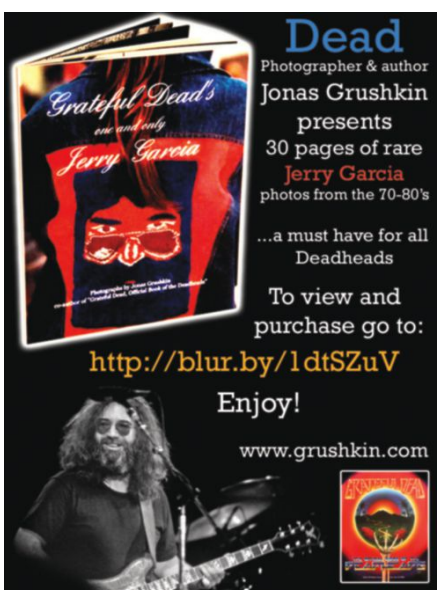

he had ever before been. "Owsley saw me as a businessman who was interested in music. I told him where I lived and said we could talk about me managing the Dead. So he came over to my house in the Upper Haight and brought some DMT and said, 'You gotta smoke this before we talk about anything.' We did, and instantly it was as complete an enveloping hallucination as you can possibly achieve on anything. Almost like an elevator—a friend of mine was there and he took one puff and fell over."

Before they smoked DMT together, Owsley had asked Scully to go through his extensive record collection and play some music. "So I put on the first Rolling Stones album and it really helped. It was a shred of reality I could hold on to while I was sitting on this rug and then swimming in it, and everything I saw looked like that. Early on, Kesey had told me, 'If you're ever tripping and you go down that hallway and open the wrong door, just remember it was something you took. Don't get afraid because that will only make it worse. Just remember you took something and it'll wear off.' Which helped me save my ass."

When Scully finally came back down from the DMT about 30 minutes later, "Owsley was expounding on this theory about music and how it reverberated and vibrated with our nervous systems, and then he went on this whole ethnomusicology rap, which made absolute sense to me because I had studied the subject myself. He was talking about the importance of what I had been doing, and I hadn't really seen it before in that scope. He said: 'In the promoter position, you have to try to get the artist for as little as possible so you can make money. What I'm proposing to you now is that you protect the art and protect the musicians by becoming the manager of the Grateful Dead and trying to get as much money as you can for them.' He imprinted me with this, and I also think he thought he would have influence over me, which he did. He selected me and he selected Garcia as well because he saw that Kesey was getting too wild and was not going to focus on the band."

Once Scully and his partner, Danny Rifkin, had decided to throw their lot in with the Grateful Dead, Owsley continued to influence the musical direction in which the band was going by convening group sessions in his cottage in Berkeley. Long before the term "gear head" had ever been invented, Owsley was already obsessive about procuring the best possible equipment for whatever task he was involved in at the moment.

Before ever meeting the Grateful Dead, Owsley had already purchased and installed a sound system in his 35-by-55-foot living room in Berkeley that far surpassed what even the most fanatical hi-fi enthusiast at the time might have dreamed of owning. Looking like "something that someone had rescued from behind the screen at the local movie theater," his Altec Lansing Voice of the Theatre system consisted of two large wooden cabinets, each of which was "about the size of a small fridge." Equipped with a 15-inch speaker, a driver that was "about four inches in diameter," and "a little horn mounted on top," each cabinet weighed a hundred pounds. Owsley then ran the sound through a McIntosh amplifier with "two channels, 40 watts per channel."

In Rock Scully's words, "Owsley brought us together in a whole other way because he had a cottage in Berkeley where there were no neighbors who could complain about the noise and the place was packed full of gear. He had tape decks and really good microphones and great speakers. It was the ideal haven that was just as high-tech in fidelity terms as you could get back then. He also had these tape loops, and so for Phil and Jerry and all of us, it was just a playground where we could get something going on a tape, start a loop, and then improvise on top of that."

When the Grateful Dead decided to follow the Pranksters to Los Angeles in February 1966 to play a series of Acid Tests down there, Owsley provided the money that enabled them all to make the trip. The band departed so abruptly from San Francisco that Jerry Garcia left his yellow, four-door Corvair parked in a gas station in Palo Alto. All of Bob Weir's clothes were in the trunk, but neither he nor Garcia ever saw the car again.

After getting on a jet plane for the first time in his life, Phil Lesh flew to Los Angeles alongside Owsley. "It was a red-eye flight," Lesh would later write, "and we were the only two people in the back of a 707." Because Owsley was footing the bill, Melissa Cargill, Tim Scully and Rock Scully (who were not related to each other), Danny Rifkin, and a friend of theirs named Ron Rakow also accompanied the band to LA.

Due, in no small part, to the high-quality LSD that Owsley was handing out at no cost to his new circle of musician friends, as well as his continuing willingness to bankroll the band with money he had made from the sale of his product on the streets throughout the Bay Area, the scene around the Grateful Dead had now started to expand at what would soon become an exponential rate.

Vocal Performance and Album of the Year.

"Some of the rock intelligentsia, and even some of our rock-star friends, dismissed us, but the folks in Nashville thought we were cool as shit," Hanna maintains. "And we thought, 'Yeah, that's even better.' Today, Americana is one big tent. It's so inclusive. You just don't have those turf wars that existed even 10 or 15 years ago."

* * *

WHILE A WORLD TOUR IN THE early '90s brought Nitty Gritty Dirt Band further attention, surprisingly, it was a shout-out by President George H.W. Bush that helped bring them notoriety by default. During an awards ceremony in Nashville, Bush bungled their name by referring to them as the "Nitty Ditty Nitty Gritty Great Bird."

McEuen rejoined the group in 2001 and, the following year, the group put out their third, and final, *Circle* set, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken: Volume III,* with a new mix of guests that included veterans of both the first and second *Circle* albums, as well as Tom Petty, Dwight Yoakam, Del McCoury, Willie Nelson and two of the band members' offspring: Jonathan McEuen and Jaime Hanna. It reached No. 5 on the country charts, but interest from the pop landscape seemed to be waning.

Still, the group continues to tour at a steady pace, recently gaining new momentum through their 50th anniversary celebration. The band also just released a new live CD and DVD, *Circlin' Back*, recorded last year at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville. ("The Dirt Band's tribute to itself," McEuen says.)

Meanwhile, McEuen recently released his own effort, *Made in Brooklyn*, a collection of traditional songs reimagined along with special guests David Bromberg, Matt Cartsonis, Jay Ungar, David Amram, John Cowan, John Carter Cash and Steve Martin. Like the original *Circle* album, it offers another example of McEuen's reverence for his roots. A revisit to "Mr. Bojangles" adds new eloquence and assurance, while covers of classics such as "She Darked the Sun," "I Still Miss Someone," "My Favorite Dream" and "Excitable Boy" provide an authentic acoustic tapestry for the album's originals.

"The intent was to take the best elements of the *Circle* album and the things that I've learned by being in this band, and create a recording where the listener is taken on a musical journey," says McEuen. "I told the other players that this was going to be like us making our own *Circle* album."

However, McEuen says any other parallels to his "day job" are negligible. "Most of the *Made in Brooklyn* music is songs I've wanted to record for years, but nobody with NGDB was interested in it. I'll just say this, 'Guys, I wish we could have done this with all of us.' But one guy in the band can't say, 'Hey, I've got 15 songs I want to do on our next album.' I'm not saying it's good or bad; it's just what it is. But within the structure of the band, I do about a fourth of what I'm capable of. It's very restrictive. I don't get to produce, arrange or suggest what parts they should play. All of that is important to me. I made this record for Chesky because, as with all my solo projects, I had total freedom. It's a privilege to record. I'm really glad I can, and I just had to. That's our job: making things for people. That's our purpose—my purpose—in life."

For his part, Hanna expresses some hesitation about making another record. "The sales were pretty soft for our last album," he remarks. "That was disappointing. We are our own record company, so when we make records, we're footing the bill. It's expensive. We have to wonder if anybody really gives a shit about albums these days. I think they do and, at some point, you have to do it. I'm hoping that when we shut down after this tour, we'll get in the studio and cut some tracks—maybe just an EP. But making an album just sounds like such a big undertaking now."

"Where many groups would quit because they weren't on the radio or they find touring to be more of a grind, the Dirt Band still survives, if not thrives," McEuen replies when asked the secret of the group's longevity. "We could have quit, but thanks to Jeff and Jimmie's ability to pick good songs, the support of our fans and record company, and the ability to try different styles of music, we were able to persevere. It was all about persistence."

"Life on the road can be complicated," Hanna concedes. "We all love to play, but I'd be lying if I said we love to travel. It's not enough sleep. It's bad food. But it's part of the lifestyle, part of the drill. We all learned the pitfalls early on. We had our share of speed bumps back in the day when we were kids because we thought we were indestructible. Fortunately, we're still all healthy and none of us act our age. So it's been a really great ride. We got on this bus in 1966 as teenagers and here we are grown dudes—grandfathers most of us. It's interesting looking back but it's also great looking forward."

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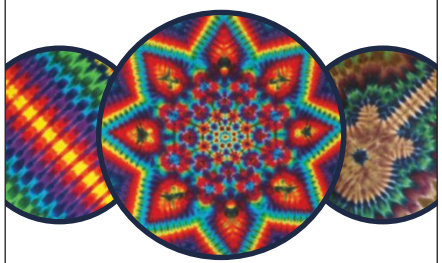
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whether they know it or not—but, hopefully, it will introduce people to music they may not know."

But, of course, the band wouldn't be caught dead simply repeating what someone else has done before. "If you make a cover song and it sounds exactly like the original, then you've kinda failed; you've missed the point," Bernhard says.

Redemption & Ruin opens up with a cover of Robert Johnson's "Drunken Hearted Man," which The Devil Makes Three transform from Johnson's sparse mosey into a pulsing, full-bodied onslaught, while the flip side of the record includes an upbeat, church-ready cover of Tom Waits' originally dirge-like "Come on Up to the House."

The covers album idea had been floating around the band for a while, and it was even going to be an all-gospel record at one point, but that idea was dismissed as "disingenuous," as McBean puts it. Instead, the two-sided end product proves to be an outlet featuring an array of songwriters to choose from—along with a mix of guest musicians, which *Redemption & Ruin* has in spades. That same album opener, for one, features some ripping lap steel from Jerry Douglas, who Turino says came with some of his own arrangements for the song—and who was "a phenomenal player and a wonderful human being."

Other guests on the album include Emmylou Harris, Tim O'Brien, Old Crow Medicine Show's Chance McCoy, who adds fiddle to the aforementioned "I Am the Man Thomas," and Mickey Raphael, who lends an organ-like harmonica to a swampy cover of Townes Van Zandt's "Waiting Around to Die."

The Devil Makes Three let all of the musicians choose the track to join in on, something that Bernhard says helped them get the most out of the process. "All the people who played on the record are great, and I didn't want to constrict them at all," he says. "There's no point in taking someone who's that good and saying, 'This is what you have to play.' I wanted them to play something they were into creatively. We left the arrangements really loose in order to make that possible, and it kept the album spontaneous. We were like, 'Well, we have an arrangement that we wrote four minutes ago—let's record it,'" Bernhard says, laughing. "That was really fun, and it kept everybody on their toes."

Besides the all-star mix of guests and songwriters, the themes of *Redemption & Ruin* are really what are at the forefront on the album—the downward spiral followed by the helping hand lifting you upward. According to Bernhard, "Side A is songs about partying and having fun and drinking and drugs, but also heartbreak and all the things that come along with that. The other side is trying to tell the story of 'Well, fuck' and trying to pick up the pieces and put your life back together."

Although no member of the trio claims to be especially religious, TDM3's songs have never shied away from the topic. "I think that, for all the problems that I have [with religion], there's a lot of beautiful and really hopeful art and music that have come out of that," McBean says. "When you listen to that music, it's so uplifting, so powerful and charged, and it doesn't really matter if you're a believer or not. It's a visceral, 'grab-you-by-the-guts' kind of thing."

The themes that run through the "Ruin" side, though, hit a little closer to home for the group. "We've known a ton of people who have struggled with addiction and depression," McBean says. "And I've struggled with that in the past, and continue to in other ways. It goes in cycles. You fall down and pick yourself back up—that's just what life is all about. If anybody ever tells you, 'I'm always totally bummed out,' or 'I'm always super happy,' they're fucking lying to you."

"I've certainly gone through my time with drugs and alcohol," Bernhard agrees. "It's something I feel like I've totally moved past, and I'm happy about that. You have to just decide which way you're gonna go—is it gonna be the type of thing where it can be an aid to your creativity, or is it gonna be the type of thing that completely takes you off the track?

"I had a friend here in Vermont who always struggled with drugs and alcohol," Bernhard continues. "He was an instrumental part of how I learned to play the guitar. When we were kids, I would just go over and hang out with him, and we would smoke weed and play songs. A couple years ago, he overdosed and died, and I always knew it was gonna happen. He was pretty out of control when it came to drugs and, if you've ever been in that situation with someone, you know you can't get them to stop; they have to want to stop. He rode that train all the way to the end. Those thoughts [have been] in the foreground for the band in the past couple years. People are dying, people are overdosing, people are losing their way. Some other people are figuring it out, getting through it. Those are really our only two choices."

Phil's 74th birthday run at The Capitol Theatre in 2014—and I had already started taking on more at Terrapin at that time, and tour managing was always something that interested me. It was something that I thought I could handle and enjoyed doing and, when the opportunity came up, I jumped on it and it's been a lot of fun over the last two years.

Basically, over the last five years, I've had my hands in a little bit of everything, every part of putting the show together, from booking the band in the first place and putting the Phil & Friends lineup together to running sound to being a guitarist to even helping out with security if necessary. Just having that experience over the last five years has been great, so I've seen every facet of a venue and of a show.

I don't know that there's been a whole lot that we've changed at Terrapin other than running things more smoothly. When we first started, we had never run a venue. We were figuring it out as we went along, and it's been really cool working for people with that much trust—that know that everything might not be perfect the first time, but we're all working toward the same goal and same experience for everyone in the band to be proud. We're all wanting to have the same experience and doing whatever it takes to get there.

What was an early lesson you learned as you started entering this world and working with Phil and Terrapin Crossroads?

I learned a lot by just getting to work with Robbie Taylor—his philosophy of always [being] ready for anything and having everything ready to go early and not getting frazzled or thrown off track when things don't necessarily happen on schedule. As everybody knows, Grateful Dead time is a little different than standard time. Just the way he handles himself has been an inspiring thing to be around.

You were pretty involved in Fare Thee Well, as far as serving as the middleman between the promoters and Phil. Can you talk about your experience working on those shows?

It was a complete honor and I took it really seriously. I was thrilled to be in my position. There would be tons of little things that would pop up, but it really was just another show. At the end of the day, it's just a band on a stage playing to a crowd, just like anywhere else. But, the thing that was eye-opening for me was that I had never been to a show like that as a fan or working—seeing how much goes into it was pretty cool.

Were there any takeaways from that experience that you've applied to your current job?

I never really listened to the Dead before. I never saw the Dead live and Terrapin has been my main window into that world. So it was great to see a glimpse of what it was like when they were going full steam and to see Phil playing on a big stage like that—just to get to see the community on that level and see how powerful the music really is.

What's your most vivid memory from Fare Thee Well?

After the last Fare Thee Well show in Chicago, I was pretty beat, as you can imagine. It had been a long couple of months leading up to it and a long few days. Everyone was all done and getting ready to leave at 2 a.m. I had just been waiting for this moment to chill and go to bed after the final show. As I'm getting ready to leave, I get a call from Brian Sarkin, who was working with us, and he said he was bringing Bill Murray over to the dressing room. I never thought I'd be disappointed to see Bill Murray, but he came and we were over there for another hour or so. So after the final night of Fare Thee Well, we were hanging out with Bill Murray and everybody.

Dean Budnick

Dawes' longtime core trio performing at Bonnaroo, one of their second homes, 6/12/15.

been dating and, for him, the inclusion of her on the album is as much about his personal joy as it is her professional acumen.

"She happens to be an amazing singer," Taylor says. "I wouldn't know what it means to try and hide a relationship but, at the same time, I wouldn't want to exploit it."

Taylor does admit to his initial concerns that any burgeoning romance could adversely affect his craft.

"I was forcing myself into a certain lifestyle of constantly being alone for fear that [love] would take away my ability to write," he says. "With Mandy, I've never been happier. I've never been more productive. I've never made two albums in two years. So, all those concerns were childish and embarrassing."

His brother and his band see the changes as well.

"It's more evident now because of his relationship and where he's at," says Griffin.

He also shared the load. Of the 10 songs, Mills co-wrote six, with Taylor and friend Jason Boesel collaborating on a pair. Where previous records were outlets to indulge darker, more personal themes, the relationship with Moore brings an inner cheerfulness to *We're All Gonna Die*.

For Taylor, it makes perfect sense.

"Making this record, singing these songs—it feels like a celebration," he says. "There's more of a smile on this record's face than others before."

* * *

A WEEK LATER, THE BAND throws a record-release party for family, friends and lucky fans, fittingly, at the Hollywood Forever Cemetery. Inside the Masonic Lodge, Dawes, with new touring guitarist Trevor Menear and Moore as a guest vocalist, debut the new material as millennials sway to the trance of the title track. Outside, a full moon hovers over Rudolph Valentino and Alfalfa from *The Little Rascals* resting in peace, the duality of celebration and smiles in the shadow of the once famous, who are forgotten a little more each day.

At the Observatory, Taylor looks out over the city. He talks about persisting motivation and doubt—the drive of the musician—name-checking the local venues that measure success in upward progression. We are all going to die, but that never stops the dreamers or the dreams.

"The guy that has never played a show in his life looks at the guy at The Echo and says, 'If only I could do what he does.' And the guy at The Echo goes to the Greek Theatre and says, 'If only I could do what he does,'" says Taylor. "And the guy at the Greek says, 'I'm here, but look at Bruce Springsteen.' And Bruce Springsteen is thinking about that guy at The Echo and writing the next great song. I don't think that ever goes away, if you're the guy who's never played a show, or Bruce Springsteen or Dawes. Especially if you're Dawes."

"We knew the substance of the album was going to be controversial for people that have liked our band in the past."
GRIFFIN GOLDSMITH

Melissa Etheridge

BY DEAN BUDNICK

MELISSA Etheridge's latest release, *MEmphis Rock and Soul*, pays tribute to Stax Records and its signature sound. Although the original Stax studio no longer exists, she recorded the album using vintage gear (including Al Green's RCA 77DX ribbon microphone) in the label's home city of Memphis at another spot with deep roots, Willie Mitchell's Royal Studios. There, she cut tracks associated with Otis Redding, The Staple Singers, Sam & Dave, William Bell and others. Etheridge explains that her intent was not only to directly spotlight the music that she loved, but also to take things a bit deeper and emphasize her musical lineage. "I wanted to draw that line and say, 'Look, this music not only inspired me, but it also inspired the people that inspired me.' Songs like 'Bring Me Some Water' and 'I'm the Only One' come directly from Albert King, from rhythm and blues, and soul music. I would sit and listen to Otis Redding and say, 'I want a song like that. I want to move people like that.' It's a very direct correlation and inspiration. The longest part was picking the songs because the catalog is deep and good and endless. There were so many different ways I could've gone. I wanted to bring The Bar-Kays and The Mar-Keys more into it. I didn't even scratch Wilson Pickett's whole thing. Ultimately, I narrowed it down to songs that resonated inside of myself like The Staple Singers, who were a huge part of my life. The reason there's so many Otis songs is he drove this project for me."

How would you characterize the power of Otis Redding?

As a songwriter, singer and an entertainer, Otis is pretty much unparalleled. I've seen a video of Janis Joplin watching Otis and then, weeks later, moving and singing just like him. He was an inspiration for me. When Otis would perform—I suppose Jackie Wilson started it first and then Otis took it from there—he was sexual in his singing and he would just be on fire. He was walking this edge of sex and pain—"I want you and you hurt me," just walking that crazy line. It wasn't as buttoned-up as Nat King Cole or Ray Charles.

It was also one of the first times the same band that had recorded the music went on the road with him. So you've got Booker T. & The MG's backing up Otis Redding and playing what they played in the studio. It's burning and it's crazy. It's everything that I've ever wanted to be onstage. I want my music to make people on fire. That is what thrills me.

The album includes "I'm a Lover," in which you build on Otis and Carla Thomas' "Tramp" to create a new song of your own. How did that come about?

I liked the song. I felt the groove was amazing, but I always felt like the talking back and forth that Carla and Otis did was a little dated. The biggest insult was that he wore overalls. So I thought, "What's the part I love?" I love the beat. Amy Winehouse and Mark Ronson did that sort of beat for "You Know I'm No Good," and it's just funky as can be.

I had the master to "Tramp" and I got to pull out pieces that had no vocals on them and I built the track. Then I was able to get the rights to sample Otis singing, "Ohh, I'm a lover" and I thought, "That's the chorus—that's the name of the song." Then, I wrote a song around it.

John Mayer adds guitar to "Rock Me Baby" and "Born Under a Bad Sign." What led you to invite him to record?

I think John Mayer is a really overlooked musician. He's an amazing guitarist, one of the finest I've ever played with. I wanted his touch because when I play these songs live, I'll be ripping apart all the solos and it'll be a lot of fun—but on the record, I wanted the straight bluesman touch. I'm not as refined at that. He has such a feel and a voice that was able to complement the song without taking it down or making it too heavy. He plays some licks that make me giggle; they're so amazing and he makes his guitar speak so well. I was so delighted that he lent his services.

John has been out on the road with Dead & Company. Have you had any interactions with the Grateful Dead family over the years?

It's funny, this year has been my first fall in with "Deadhead land." They're amazing. I wasn't a big follower, yet I love jamband music. I'll sit up there and jam with you all day long. I've been putting my foot in that world. I sat in with Roger McNamee's Moonalice band at Ashkenaz in Berkeley, Calif. All these great musicians play and their tribe shows up. It was a big Dead thing.

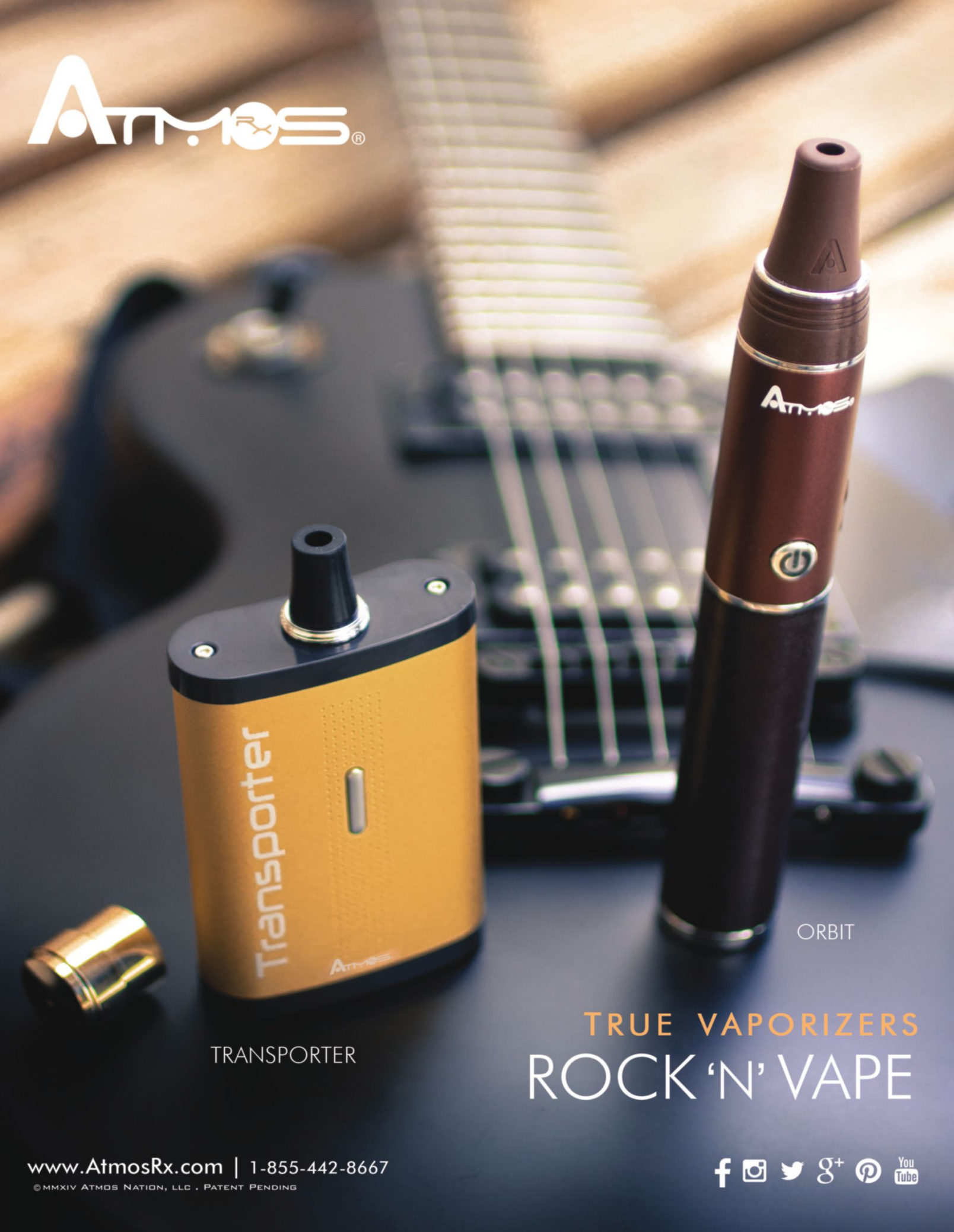
John Mayer tells me he's gonna send me the five songs that will make me understand why I should be playing with the Grateful Dead. He wants to get me into it, and I am not against it.

Along with the new record, you're also releasing a new line of medical marijuana products. [Etheridge's Private Reserve Cannabis-Infused Wine Tincture debuted in 2015. She has said that she began using medical marijuana after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004.]

I've been dealing with the cannabis industry for the last few years and, boy, has it changed. I had a dispensary—I still have a dispensary license—but the landlord went nuts and thought he could have the thing himself. So we don't have a dispensary right now, but we make products through Etheridge Farms that are being rolled out. I'm very deep into the cannabis industry.

What impact do you think recording this album, and immersing yourself in this music, will have on your future songwriting?

The history I've learned, I will take and hold forever. It's such a big part of our musical history. Being able to sing these songs live is also a gift to myself. It's something I'm going to hold onto and I think it's a part of me that people love. I will always carry it with me.



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